

Sri Bhagavad-Gita

The Honey-Elixir for Humanity



INTRODUCTION

Invitation to a spiritual journey
for the true import of Sri Bhagavad-Gita

(Learning Through Conversation)

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INTRDOUCTION - Learning Through Conversation



Approach to Sri Bhagavdgita

§ The Journey

The glory of Sri Bhagavad-Gita is immense and truly beyond the limits of all descriptions. As the gem arisen out of the vast ocean of *Mahabharata*, the magnum-opus of Sage Vyasa, Sri Bhagavad-Gita is universally revered as the song of Lord, the revelation of supreme truth for solving the most fundamental problem of all human-kind. It is not a text of a specific religious belief or a doctrine from a particular school of thought but the knowledge-supreme that provides everyone the path for perfection, total-freedom and complete-fulfilment.

Starting from Bhagavan Sri Adi Sankara, numerous saints and scholars have spread the glory of Sri Bhagavad-Gita (Gita) with their eloquence and elucidations. There is an abundance of literature and teachers, available and growing, to impart the knowledge from Gita, yet it can never be enough!

An ancient Sanskrit verse asserts that in the writings of noble and virtuous authors, rest the angels of “meaning” whose refuge is in the words and the hiatus therein, only to show-up again, whenever a sincere aspirant attempts to learn diligently, appearing in front, dancing gleefully, revealing the newer and deeper meaning every time, fitting the maturity and spiritual earnestness of the aspirant. Perhaps that is why, like a kaleidoscope, Gita shines so many varied perspectives and newer insights with its never-ending treasure of wisdom for every sincere seeker, at every time. That is why there can never be a ‘once-and-for-all interpretation’ for Sri Bhagavad-Gita.

It is because of its immense potential, one life-time can never be enough to comprehend all that is contained in the Gita; yet one’s life-time could be totally in vain, if at least an attempt to understand the import of Bhagavad-Gita is not made. Thanks to so many inspired teachings on Gita by many scholars, we are able to read, listen and contemplate, at least, on some of those diverse interpretations.



Aiya, the Atma-Guru residing within the deep cavities of the aspirant's heart, is always available at the times of need. As a friend, philosopher and guide, Aiya lights that extra spark to reorient the life-journey and refine life-goals. Like a 'bee' that earnestly searches and collects nectar from varied flowers, tasting it, and at the same time, preserving as honey for everyone's consumption, the 'bee' in Aiya is offering the pot of Bhagavad-Gita- honey, in which every bit of text-proper is covered, with elucidation for easier digestion.

My quest of understanding Sri Bhagavad-Gita and his promise for leading me to witness the unravelling of Sri Bhagavad-Gita within the canvas of mind had led me to take up the spiritual journey with Aiya. At the foot-hills of Himalayas near the holy city of Rishikesh, along the shores of fleeting Ganges, is the large banyan-tree, with its vast branches nested as the canopy over the sky, where we have arranged to meet every evening for the next 18 nights of contemplation.

Please come along and join this pilgrimage! Your unwavering commitment to learn and the generosity to open your heart are the only requirements; in return is the feast of Sri Bhagavad-Gita, the honey-elixir in all its pristine purity to consume. To cherish the vibrancy and the taste of each drop, we have Aiya's enlightening-comments, culminating the essence of learning and experience. Doubts that arise when and where are addressed then and there.

May we begin the journey!

§ Prayer I

The first evening has arrived. I sat with Aiya on the large stone under the glorious banyan tree. The hazy early evening stars have lazily appeared on the sky, twinkling.

Aiya said “Well, open your mind and upon it, may the vision of what we are about to study, project! May we listen intensely to the voices that we shall hear! May we, transporting ourselves in time-and-space, visualize together, gain vivid observation and learn! May we freely raise our doubts, share our perspectives and mutually learn! May we pray to Lord Krishna! May we pray to great Sadgurus! May we start every session with a prayer to steer us to supreme knowledge! May the benign grace lead us to the truth!”

Saying thus, Aiya closed his eyes and started chanting the *dhyāna shloka* of Sri Bhagavad-Gita. I too followed suite. The Evening was fading away and the breeze of early night changed its direction, gently now washing our faces.

Om

*pārthāya pratibodhitāṁ bhagavatā nārāyaṇena svayam
vyāsenā grathitāṁ purāṇamuninā madhye mahābhāratam |
advaitāṁṛtacvarṣiṇīṁ bhagavatīṁ aṣṭādaśādhyāyīnīṁ
amba tvāmanusandadhāmī bhagavadgīte bhavedveṣiṇīṁ || 1 ||*

O Mother Bhagavad Gita,

You are the teaching imparted to Arjuna by the very Lord Narayana Himself, Complied by Vyāsacharya, the very incarnation of Vishnu, who has given us the Purāṇas, as Bhagavad Gita, occurring in the middle of Mahabharata, showering the honey-elixir of Non-dual infinite truth, in eighteen chapters, the destroyer of Samsāra! You are Mother Sarasvati, nourishing my mental and intellectual faculties, May I meditate upon you!



§ The Purpose

Although I have read Sri Bhagavad-Gita before, I am yet to grasp the true import. So I hastened with my basic doubt on the merits of learning Bhagavad-Gita.

“Aiya, I know the setting is the battlefield with the parade of soldiers on both sides and on a beautiful chariot is Lord Krishna, holding the reins of white horses that are poised, with Arjuna standing on the Chariot, raring to fight. I know this is where the Lord teaches Arjuna and His teachings revered as Bhagavad-Gita, ‘the song of God’. My doubt is, if the teaching is to help the plights of Arjuna who is being challenged with a bloody battle, how is it relevant to us? Our situations vary, the contexts differ and therefore, what makes Bhagavad Gita, which is offered to Arjuna, the warrior, to be the universal teaching for the mankind?”

“Reasonable question”, Aiya Said.

“Understanding the context of battlefield and the condition of Arjuna are quite essential in order to realize the very nature of human-problems. Only then one could appreciate the significance of Bhagavad-Gita as the teaching to whole mankind. That is why starting with the observation of the battlefield and the plight of Arjuna – who is the dominant speaker in the 1st chapter, is critical for our learning. Let us witness the first chapter and at the end of it, if you are not convinced of the true benefits of learning Bhagavad-Gita, then of course, you can decide!”

Aiya continued.

“Technically, Bhagavad-Gita begins only when the Lord starts to speak later (from 2nd chapter). Bhagavan Sankara’s elucidation on Gita also begins only then. But there are good reasons why our learned sages have asked us to learn from the battlefield and the problems for Arjuna, precisely to address the common doubt that you have raised.”

“Ok Aiya, I have read Mahabharata before and know the background of this battle. I am aware that it was the last resort for the Pandavas to claim what was rightly belonged to them. Was it not?”

“Yes. But we are not going to be dwelling on the story of the long running feud between the Kauravas clan, led by Duryodhana on one side and the five broth-

ers, Pancha Pandavas led by Yudhistira on the other. Our focus is on Arjuna, who is taken to represent ‘the aspirant’ amongst us, seeking perfection, and ‘the battlefield’, the ordeals of embodied life in this world.”

I was earnestly listening.

“The entire Bhagavad-Gita is the cure for the fundamental human-issue which appears as different types of problems, driving us to search for different types of solutions.”

“Does Bhagavad-Gita provide solution to every problem of human-kind?”, I asked with wonder.

“Of course, but how you may wonder! To solve a problem is one thing but to dissolve a problem is completely a different thing. Dissolving the problem requires the true understanding of the root-cause of the problem and the ways to address it. Vedanta identifies the root-cause of all human-problems and also gives its ‘only’ possible cure. This very essence of Vedanta is what is elaborated in Gita to equip us to deal with it, so that all our sufferings end.”

“What is it Aiya? Also why this problem applies only to the human race?”

“Let us first know the name of this unique problem and then understand why it is only the human-problem. It is called *Samsāra*”.

He continued.

“*Samsāra* refers to a vicious cycle of entrapment where we are forever in search of happiness, as we always lack fulfilment. In other words, *Samsāra* is like going on a blindfolded trip seeking happiness out of everything in the world but without knowing where it is! We all are trapped in this vain search”

“I don’t reconcile with this Aiya. I am not blindly searching as I go for what I need. I just want to live happily and I look for ways to support this goal. Do you call this as *Samsāra*? ”

“We all have different names to what we search for except that we tend to believe what we are seeking is going to make us happy. It could be knowledge, money, health, love, relationship, depending on the scope of our need and the intensity of our desire! We search for different things at different times, but the very acqui-

sition of what we have searched for so long eventually does not end our quest. It is because the objects of desire that we went after and acquired, after some point of time, stop giving us the happiness that we expected of them. So we continue to seek something else. Don't you agree?"

"Yes Aiya, our needs and desires change. Is it not a sign of progress and refinement of our goals?"

"Correct! In fact, the scriptures have analysed this perpetual quest of human-beings and concluded that the search is actually for a state of recognition that there is nothing else needed to be happy. This state of bliss would mean an end to the need for searching externally anymore. The very end of desire means the release from the entrapment of viscous search of happiness. This recognition of eternal fulfilment is called *Ananda* which liberates. It is the truth or *Sat* and knowing this truth and identifying oneself with the knowledge of truth is called *Cit*"

I must have drawn a blank-face by then as Aiya paused for a while and touched me on the shoulders.

"Listen, what we are inherently seeking is liberation, freedom from Samsāra. That freedom is called '*mokshā*' or '*mukti*'. This is the subtlest of the truth and the cognition of this truth at once releases us from the bondage."

I pleaded, "Aiya, I am truly lost. When you mentioned about the perpetual lack of fulfilment, I sort of recognize with it as we all are always looking for something better in everything. But now you say that we seek liberation to be free from bondage etc., I am confused. What is this bondage? If it is all about the cycle of birth and death, then I don't agree as it is only a human-problem. All forms of life do go through this cycle of birth and death. So what is bondage and what is liberty that only the human-beings need to address?"

"I understand your question. All life-forms: the plants, insects, animals and human-beings – all share the same road map for their embodied existence like 'birth' and 'death' and in between the needs 'to eat', 'to sleep' and 'to breed'. These natural instincts are common to all life-forms and only these animating conditions define them as '*Jivā*' or the 'life-form' and collectively as '*Jiva-rāsi*' or 'all varieties of life-forms'. Yet, amongst them, the human-beings are very special. Do you know why?"

I thought of answering, but kept quite, as Aiya continued.

“Only the human-beings have the evolved form of self-awareness. We are the only life-form that exhibit self-consciousness as one knows and say ‘I am a human-being’. Animals and plants don’t do that. They have no self-identity except for their inherent physical instincts.”

“Yes Aiya. Does self-identity alone make us superior amongst the life-forms?”

“Yes, self-identity is due to the evolved state of consciousness which also expands the mind and intellect. With these enhanced faculties, human-beings are able to rule other life-forms and also the world.”

“So where is the problem?”

“As we take the self-identity and subsequently the ownership of things around us, we also take ownership for our actions and the results. That’s where the problem starts. On the contrary, other life-forms act only on their natural instincts to fulfil, such as hunger, sleep or on the impulse to breed; they do not act on desires for pleasure. Since those life-forms have no self-identity or ownership of their actions, they also don’t have any sense of right or wrong; so their actions are not to be judged as virtuous or sinful. Their life on earth is to simply expend their embodied duration under the protection of Lord, the power of nature. But our case is different”

“Aiya, you sound as if the evolved capabilities of our mind and intellect are somehow a limitation!”

“Not at all, those are indeed our greatest assets; in fact, they verily define who we are. But while giving distinct advantages compared to other life-forms, those also may lead to many deficiencies”

“Like what, Aiya?”

“Many! Have you ever seen a stray-dog being jealous of a pet-dog at a well-to-do home? No, animals don’t have such feelings. In a butcher’s shop, while one animal is being slaughtered, the other stays calm, happily eating, not worried about it being the next to be slaughtered. Why? They don’t fear for the future. Of course, like us, animals are also subjected to death, disease and pain due to ailment etc., but these are only at physical level; they don’t have sorrow, the ailment of the mind. Fear of what will happen in the future is only a human-weakness. Only humans have thoughts leading to greed, miserliness, rage, jealousy, ar-

rogance etc.”

“Yes Aiya, why such feelings occur? I don’t plan to be greedy or jealous but these things happen naturally”

“Yes, that is the intrinsic nature of mind. No parent deliberately teaches the child to hide truth, but don’t we see children lie? What makes them to do so?”

“Agree Aiya! That is why I am saying that it is in the nature and not our fault”

“But with our intellect, don’t we seek to influence and change the nature? We have to act. In the garden, you intently seed and nurture the plants of your desire, but there come innumerable weeds! Don’t you persist to remove those weeds as those come, and also explore the ways to prevent their recurrence! Our mind is also like the soil of a fertile garden for us to tend.”

Aiya looked at my face and said.

“Listen carefully, every ‘thought’ is a natural seed that germinate and grow in our mind. If you carefully analyse, you don’t think what to think! All thoughts just happen and as those come; we identify with those, own up those and act.”

“Aiya, I sort of understand. Sometimes I don’t even know why I am fearful of the future or why certain thoughts arise that unsettle my peace. Is that the reason, you said that we are all entrapped?”

“The state of being driven by such vices, what the scriptures enumerate as *kāma*, *krodhā*, *lobhā*, *mohā*, *mata*, *māscharya* keep us in the constant fear of the future or grief over the past, and with the ceaseless desires! All these represent Samsāra. Now tell me, don’t you consider this as a unique problem for the human-race alone? Don’t you therefore think a way to cut free from this entrapment as the primary, or the only, goal of our life?”

“Yes Aiya, if there is a solution to Samsāra, then knowing about it is the foremost step. But I always viewed the words ‘mokshā, mukti’ etc. refer to some sort of freedom available only after death. That is why many of us don’t really seek mokshā! After all, I want to live long in this world!” - This I said somewhat sheepishly.

Aiya laughed.

“Long may you live my friend! But do realize, mokshā or liberation from Samsāra should be sought the very moment one knows of its possibility. Tell me, if mokshā means leading a life without any fear of the future, completely fulfilled with virtuous qualities and be able to take control of your life, would you still prefer mokshā only after your death?”

“No Aiya, in this life and in this world”

“Then at, what age you would want to learn about mokshā and the tools and qualifications required for it? Would you wait for your retirement?”

I hesitated to answer. Aiya continued.

“Listen, The truth of Vedanta – which reveals to you the effects of Samsāra and the way to steer clear of its evil impact – must be grabbed as early as possible so that every aspect of our embodied life is beautiful and fulfilled. Embodied life is to enjoy. Veda considers ‘**dehā**’ is for ‘**boga**’. But true enjoyment is possible only when we don’t loss ourselves in the act of enjoyment and also not driven by the uncontrolled weeds of our mind. This is the knowledge that we all should acquire when we are young so that the rest of our life is full of fun.”

“Yes Aiya”, I ceded lamenting inside how long I have lost in this goal.

“This knowledge is unfortunately not imparted formally in our academic institutions as their focus is on the art and science of handling the material-world. So, we need to augment such scholarship with spiritual-knowledge. The most elegant as well as the exhaustive teaching of this supreme knowledge is contained in Sri Bhagavad-Gita, which it conveys so beautifully. Interestingly, starting from Vedanta, all great spiritual texts of India follow a method of dialogue, usually between the teacher and disciple, to smoothly transmit the knowledge. So is Sri Bhagavad-Gita which is all revealing and all fulfilling!”

Aiya remained silent for a while and then said. “Don’t worry, we shall learn all about this, straight from the words of Lord. We will witness the unravelling of Sri Bhagavad-Gita. However, to really understand how the words of the Lord matter directly to your day-to-day life, you must intensely observe the plight of Arjuna and relate his with that of your personal ordeals. That is how the essence of Bhagavad-Gita could be internalized as the cure to your problems and a boost to your personal transformation.”

I briefly bowed to Aiya and sat down at his feet.

The crescent moon of ashtami thithi was shining on the dark sky as the breeze carried the mild chillness of the fleeting Ganga, gently caressing our faces. As I closed my eyes, magically there was stillness spreading across the canvas of my mind. I tuned to Aiya's words while the grand vision of Kurukshetra emerged.



Next

Part -01



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Sri Bhagavad-Gita
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oi: Arjuna Vishāda Yoga
Arjuna's Despondency as the Turning-point

(Learning Through Conversation)

Prior reading of earlier chapter is recommended

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o1: Arjuna Vishāda Yoga Arjuna's Despondency as the Turning-point



O1: Arjuna Vishāda Yoga

§ Chapter or

After reciting the prayer with Aiya, I was visualizing in my mind as Aiya continued to narrate.

“You now see the palace of Hastinapur. There is the blind King Dhritarashtra seated; next to him is Sanjaya. The sudden surge of anxiety in King Dhritarashtra is evident as he has summoned Sanjaya to narrate what is going on at the distant battlefield, the Kurukshetra. Till now, the King was not overly interested to hear the updates from the battlefield, because, on one side, he was dreading on the possibility of tragic-news about his own children and on the other side, he had a strong view that as long as mighty Bhishma is alive, nothing would happen to his children. But Bhishma is now fallen and the news has reached the King. It is the tenth-day of the war and the King is very worried about his children and fearing, he asks Sanjaya to narrate all that has happened so far, starting from the first day of the war, and continue to what happens from now on.”

Aiya continued.

“Perhaps already knowing the potential of this situation, earlier Sage Vyasa has granted a special power to Sanjaya, a pious charioteer of the King, for able to witness distant events at the battlefield and also narrate with a full understanding of the state of mind of those in the battlefield. Now we are going to witness what Sanjaya is narrating to the King and through his narration we also see what has happened and what is going on at the battlefield.”

With that introduction, we immersed in the grand vision.

We saw the palace of Hastinapur and the worried looks of King Dhritarashtra. Sanjaya standing next to him, was staring into the distant sky, where the scenes of Kurukshetra, the battlefield appeared.

§ The Battlefield



We witnessed King Dhirtarashtra asking Sanjaya.

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca .

dharmaकsetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścāva kimakurvata sañjaya (I.1)

sañjaya uvāca .

dṛṣṭvā tu pāṇḍavānīkaṁ vyūḍhaṁ duryodhanastadā
ācāryam upasaṅgamya rājā vacanam abravīt (I.2)

paśyaitāṁ pāṇḍuputraṇāmācārya mahatīṁ camūm
vyūḍhaṁ drupadaputreṇa tava śiṣyeṇa dhīmatā (I.3)

“Asked Dhritarashtra: In the field of righteousness called Kurukshetra, O Sanjaya, what are my sons and Pandavas, assembled and excited to fight, doing? (I.1);

Spoke thus Sanjaya: Upon seeing the many battle formations of the Pandava’s army, King Duryodhana approached his teacher and uttered these words (I.2);

O great teacher, look at the military might of the army of Pandu's sons, marshalled by your intelligent disciple and son of Drupada. (1.3)."

Aiya told me.

"Look, Duryodhana is so envious and vengeful that his guru Drona has a long held affinity towards Pandava, now swayed by the rage, Duryodhana began to speak sarcastically to tease and hurt him, even though his guru is prepared to fight on his behalf".

We saw Duryodhana pointing to the rest of Pandava's army, lamenting out of fear.

atra śūrā maheśvāsā bhīmārjunasamā yudhi .
yuyudhāno virāṭaśca drupadaśca mahārathaḥ (1.4)

dhṛṣṭaketuścekitānaḥ kāśirājaśca vīryavān .
purujitkuntibhojaśca śaibyaśca narapuṅgavaḥ (1.5)

yudhāmanyuśca vikrānta uttamaujāśca vīryavān .
saubhadro draupadeyāśca sarva eva mahārathāḥ (1.6)

"Here in this army are great heroes and archers, as good as Arjuna and Bhima in fighting, like Yuyudhna, Virata and also the great charioteer, Drupada (1.4).

And there are valiant fighters like Dhristaketu, Chekitanu, King of Kasi, the powerful Purujit, Kuntibhoja and Saibya, the praise-worthy among men (1.5).

There are also the valorous Yudhamanyu, mighty Uttamauja, Abhimanyu the son of Subhadra and the sons of Draupadi who are all great charioteers (1.6)."

Perhaps realizing that the support of Drona is important, Duryodhana is trying to make it up by praising Drona and also his own army.

asmākaṁ tu viśiṣṭā ye tānnibodha dvijottama .
nāyakā mama sainyasya samjnārthaṁ tānbravīmi te (1.7)

bhavānbhīṣmaśca karṇaśca kṛpaśca samitiñjayah .
aśvatthāmā vikarṇaśca saumadattistathāiva ca (1.8)

anye ca bahavaḥ śūrā madarthe tyaktajīvitāḥ .
nānāśastrapraharaṇāḥ sarve yuddhaviśāradāḥ (I.9)

aparyāptam tadasmākam balaṁ bhīṣmābhiraṅkitam .
paryāptam tvidameteśām balaṁ bhīṣmābhiraṅkitam (I.10)

“But know, O the best of twice born, those the most distinguished amongst us in our army, such as (I.7);

You, Bhishma, Karna, ever victorious Kripa, Aswaththama, Vikarna and Somadatta’s son, who are the best combination for victory in any war, are there (I.8);

And innumerable other heroes too, willing to give-up their lives for my sake, armed with variety of weapons and missiles, mastered in the art of warfare (I.9).

Unlimited is our strength, well protected by our grandfather Bhishma, while insufficient is the size of the Pandavas’ army, although it is well protected by Bhima. (I.10)”

Aiya said “Notice how already defeated in mind Duryodhana is! In spite of having a larger army, he is afraid of Pandava being led by Bhima. Even with the protection of his army by mighty Bhishma, Duryodhana is fearful.”

“Aiya, Is Duryodhana a coward?”, I asked.

“Well, there is a great insight in this. No matter how rich and strong you are, if you are not in the path of righteousness, then you will not have the moral courage to face the challenges of life. The peace and self-confidence will erode when one is aware of one’s deviation from righteousness. Duryodhana many a times before had declared that he knew the difference between the right and the wrong but simply could not adhere to righteousness. Now we can see his fear as he has no moral courage. That is why we must always earn and preserve the internal peace and the moral courage; that is possible only when we follow the path of dharma.”

“Aiya, Why did Duryodhana call Drona as the best among the twice-born?”

“Well, the literal meaning of the word ‘**Dvija**’ is ‘twice-born’. In those days, the

followers of Sanātana Dharma considered that every human-child when born is a '*shudrā*', until he or she takes a divine vow to follow certain life-style and the appropriate dharma. These are broadly grouped into '*Brāhmaṇi*' for those who dedicate their entire life for studying and propagating the scriptural code and moral value for the benefit of all and thereby leading a simple life, or '*Kshatirya*' who are prepared to die for the protection of others and therefore commit to the roles of administration and safeguarding of others, or '*Vysyā*' who commit to take-up activities for creating and transacting wealth for the welfare of all. Everyone who takes up such a divine vow through prescribed ceremony thus becomes the twice-born. Those who do not take up such specific role remain as '*Shudrā*' by default assuming the role of helping all others. That is why Duryodhana calls Drona as the best among the twice-born. We will discuss this and the unfortunate abuse of such social order as we get a chance to hear from the Lord later."

We watched as Duryodhana was speaking towards his army.

ayaneṣu ca sarveṣu yathābhāgama vasthitāḥ
bhīṣmamevābhiraṅkantu bhavantāḥ sarva eva hi (I.II)

"All of you go and take up your assigned respective strategic places and protect Bhishma (I.II)"

Perhaps sensing the anxiety in Duryodhana, Bhishma began to sound his conch as Sanjaya explained.

taśya sañjanayanharṣam̄ kuruvṛddhaḥ pitāmahaḥ .
simhanādām̄ vinadyoccaīḥ śaṅkham̄ dadhmau pratāpavān (I.I2)

tataḥ śaṅkhāśca bheryāśca pañavānakagomukhāḥ .
saḥasaivābhyaḥanyanta sa śabdastumulo'bhavat (I.I3)

"Then valiant Bhishma, the oldest among the Kurus and the great grandfather, blew his conch, roaring aloud like a lion, giving a boost (to Duryodhana) (I.I2).

Then all at once, conches, kettle drums, cymbals, drums and horns were all blown suddenly resulting in a tumultuous noise (I.I3)."

Sanjaya turned to the side of Pandava and narrated what he saw.

tataḥ śvetairhayairyukte mahati syandane sthitau .
mādhavaḥ pāṇḍavaścaiva divyau śaṅkhau pradadhmatuḥ (1.14)

pāñcajanyam hrṣīkeśo devadattam dhanañjayaḥ .
paunḍram dadhmau mahāśaṅkham bhīmakarmā vṛkodaraḥ (1.15)

anantavijayam rājā kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhirah .
nakulaḥ sahadevaśca sughoṣamaṇipuṣpakau (1.16)

kāśyaśca parameśvāsaḥ śikhaṇḍī ca mahārathaḥ .
dhṛṣṭadyumno virāṭaśca sātyakiścāparājitaḥ (1.17)

“Then Madhava and the Son of Pandu (Arjuna) seated in a great chariot, drawn by white horses, blew their divine conches namely (1.14);

‘Panchajanyam’ by Hrisikesa, ‘Devadatta’ by Arjuna, ‘Paundram’ by Bhima, the voracious eater yet with lean stomach and performer of mighty deeds (1.15);

‘Anantavijayam’ by the King and Kunti’s son, Yudhishtira, ‘Sughosha’ by Nakula and ‘Manipushpaka’ by Sahadeva (1.16);

The holder of mighty bow, King of Kasi, the supreme archer, Sikhandi, the great charioteer, Dhristadyumna, Virata and the invincible Satyaki, blew their respective conches (1.17).”

Aiya touched my shoulder and said.

“Did you hear, Sanjaya used the term ‘Hrisikesa’ for Krishna. The term ‘Hrishikesa’ means one who controls the sense-organs. This war is the result of many senseless acts. Sanjaya who has the capacity to read the minds, knows that soon, Arjuna will be deluded, and attempt to take senseless action. Only the Lord, the controller of all senses could cure the delusion.”

We continued to watch.

Sanjaya has turned to Dhritarashtra and said.

drupado draupadeyāśca sarvaśaḥ pṛthivīpate .
saubhadraśca mahābāhuḥ śaṅkhāndadhmuḥ pṛthakpṛthak (1.18)

sa ghoṣho dhārtarāṣṭrāṇāṁ hṛidayāni vyadārayat
nabhaśchā prīthivīṁ chaiva tumulo nunādayan (1.19)

atha vyavasthitāndṛṣṭvā dhārtarāṣṭrān kapidhvajah
pravṛtte śastrasampāte dhanurudyamya pāṇḍavah (1.20)
hṛṣikeśam tadā vākyamidamāha mahīpate

“O Lord of the Earth! Drupada, the sons of Draupadi, Subhadra’s son and the mighty armed Abhimanyu also blew their conches (1.18).

That tumultuous noise shattered the hearts of the Dhritarashtra’s sons, making both sky and the earth resound (1.19).

There upon, watching the sons of Dhritarashtra thus arrayed, Arjuna is preparing himself for the battle, becoming ready to take the bow into his hands (1.20).”

I was intensely looking at Arjuna who, with the raised bow in his hand, was standing on the chariot that hoisted the flag bearing the symbol of Lord Hanuman.

Sanjaya addressed Dhritarashtra.

arjuna uvāca .
senayorubhayormadhye rathāṁ sthāpaya me’cyuta (1.21)

yāvadetānnirīkṣe’ham yoddhukāmānavasthitān .
kairmayā saha yoddhavyamasmin raṇasamudyame (1.22)

yotsyamānānavekṣe’ham ya ete’tra samāgataḥ .
dhārtarāṣṭrasya durbuddheryuddhe priyacikīrṣavaḥ (1.23)

“O Lord of the world, Arjuna said these words to Hrisikesa, O Achuta, the infallible One, in between these two armies, please take my chariot and park such that I can have a clear view (1.21).

I want to see them all who are now here standing with the desire to fight and

with whom I have to fight in the battle that is imminent (1.22).

Let me also see all those who have assembled here to fight, wishing the welfare of the evil minded son of Dhritarashtra (1.23)"

Sanjaya turned to Dhritarashtra and said

sañjaya uvāca .

evamukto hrṣīkeśo guḍākeśena bhārata .
senayorubhayormadhye sthāpayitvā rathottamam (1.24)

bhīṣmadroṇapramukhataḥ sarveśāṁ ca mahikṣitāṁ .
uvāca pārtha paśyaitānsamavetānkurūniti (1.25)

tatrāpaśyatsthitānpārthaḥ pitṛnatha pitāmahān .
ācāryānmātulānbhrātṛnputrānpautrānsakhīṁstathā (1.26)

śvaśurānsuhṛdaścaiva senayorubhayorapi .
tānsamīkṣya sa kaunteyah sarvānbandhūnavasthitān (1.27)

"O, Bharata, Addressed thus by Arjuna, Krishna stationed their excellent chariot between the two armies, positioned (1.24);

In front of Bhishma, Drona and all the great warriors of the world, so that Arjuna could see all the Kauravas (1.25).

There, standing between the two armies Arjuna saw his elders, grandfathers, teachers, maternal uncles, brothers, sons, grandsons, friends and also (1.26),

Fathers-in-law and well-wishers across both sides of the armies. After seeing the kith and kin assembled there, Arjuna, (1.27),

was overwhelmed with compassion and said the following words with great sorrow."

"Aiya, I pity Arjuna, it is indeed a terrible situation - to confront your own people", I said.

"Yes, notice how earlier Arjuna has commanded his charioteer Krishna to take

a position for him to see the evil enemies and now, see what he is saying! To test Arjuna's resolve, how purposefully the Lord has stopped the chariot, just in front of those, against whom Arjuna has to prove his strength of character and the resolve!"

"What will happen now Aiya?"

"You asked me earlier how to identify the effects of *samsārā*. Here is the witness that is going to be on display in three parts. So watch carefully."

With closed eyes, I was listening to Aiya.

"The first trigger of *samsārā* is '*rāga*', the emotional attachment to others and the passion towards the objects of desire."

I interrupted "You mean the love we show to others?"

"No, there is a difference. *Rāga* or attachment is driven only by selfish-desires. It is all about seeking some personal gains; on the other hand, true love is all about the welfare to the person or object of love. Remember, love is always about giving unconditionally; But attachment is always about taking; it is conditional. That is why attachment always weakens us and deludes our intellect. With love, we become strong."

"Aiya, why suddenly Arjuna is falling in to the trap of attachment?"

"Attachment is kindled at various contexts. One is proximity. When the object of desire is near, the intensity of your attachment on the object will increase. Arjuna is now seeing many in the opposite side of the battlefield with whom he has deep emotional attachment. This is causing havoc to his otherwise clear mind and intellect. Without the right knowledge and clear intellect, taking the right resolve is not possible."

§ Arjuna's Delusion

We continued to watch.

kṛpayā parayāviṣṭo viṣīdannidamabравīt .
arjuna uvāca .

drṣṭvemam svajanaṁ kṛṣṇa yuyutsum samupasthitam (1.28)

sīdanti mama gātrāṇi mukhaṁ ca pariśuṣyati .
vepathuśca śarīre me romaharṣaśca jāyate (1.29)

gāṇḍīvam sramṣate hastāttvakcaiva paridahyate .
na ca śaknomyavasthātum bhramatīva ca me manah (1.30)

nimittāni ca paśyāmi viparītāni keśava .
na ca śreyo'nupaśyāmi hatvā svajanamāhave (1.31)

"Said Arjuna, Seeing all these kinsfolk, O Krishna, assembled here in such a fighting spirit, (1.28);

All the limbs of my body are quivering and my mouth is becoming parched. My whole body is shivering, the hairs standing on their tip (1.29);

Gandivam, my bow, is sliding from my hand, and my skin is burning all over, nor I am able to stand properly as my mind is reeling (1.30);

I foresee extreme consequences, O Kesava. I am unable to see any positive good by killing my kinsfolk in this fight (1.31)."

Aiya said, "Now you see the second part of samsārā: '**shokā**' or 'grief'. It is the result of rāga. If there is attachment, there is bound to be grief. Can't you see the dread and despair of Arjuna, reflected through his words? He is indeed inflicted by deep shokā".

"Aiya, is attachment the only cause of grief?"

"Indeed! Shokā is the mental agony resulting from rāga. When there is emotional attachment on an object, then there is anxiety and grief until it is acquired.

But when the object of desire is possessed, there is fear of losing and when lost, there is immense sadness. Since all objects are impermanent in nature, grief is therefore guaranteed as the result of attachment, so be aware, every attachment is a potential sorrow.”

“Aiya, how can we not have some level of emotional attachment to things that we love?”

“Well, do love but don’t be emotionally attached. I understand the inevitability of some level of emotional attachments in life. But be prepared for the potential grief that such attachments would lead to. Preparation means doing what is necessary even before the grief sets in.”

“Aiya, we don’t plan for grieving”- I said with some wonder.

“That is the problem! As we have attachments, we should also provision for potential grief from those attachments. Preparation to handle when grief strikes is important and such a preparation is possible only while we are joyful or at least free from distress.”

“I understand. But can we not look for the ways only after the grief strikes? That way we don’t need to unduly spoil the time of rejoice”

“No. Once you are affected by shokā, the third trigger of samsārā kicks in. It is called *mohā* or delusion. When the mind is laden with grief and despair, it’s intellectual faculty will also become clouded, soon losing the capacity to comprehend the situations correctly or take right decisions. So instead of escaping the grief, one will go deeper into more emotional attachments, dwell in self-pity and lose heart by taking only wrong decisions. So preparations is the key! One cannot be planning about digging a well when one’s house is already ablaze!”

Aiya stressed. “Listen to Arjuna who is afflicted by all these three triggers of samsārā.”

na kāṅkṣe vijayam kṛṣṇa na ca rājyam sukhāni ca .
kim no rājyena govinda kim bhogairjīvitena vā (I.32)

yeśāmarthe kāṅkṣitam no rājyam bhogāḥ sukhāni ca .
ta ime'vasthitā yuddhe prāṇāṁstyaktvā dhanāni ca (I.33)

ācāryāḥ pitaraḥ putrāstathaiva ca pitāmahāḥ .
mātulāḥ śvaśurāḥ paurāḥ śyālāḥ sambandhinastathā (1.34)

etānna hantumicchāmi ghnato'pi madhusūdana .
api trailokyarājyasya hetoḥ kiṁ nu mahīkṛte (1.35)

"I do not desire victory O Krishna, nor kingdom, nor enjoyment, of what use to us, O Govinda, the kingdom or the enjoyments or even the life (1.32)?

For whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyment and all the comforts, they are all here standing in the battle field, having decided to give up their lives and riches (1.33);

Teachers, elders, sons, and also grandfathers, maternal uncles, fathers-in-law, grandsons, brothers-in-law and kinsmen, (1.34);

O Madhusudhana, even though they may wish to kill me, I do not like to kill them, not even for the sake of the three worlds; then what to speak of (doing it for) the earth (1.35)! "

"Did you notice, Arjuna is calling Krishna with the name 'Madhusudhana'? Krishna has earlier killed the demon Madhu and therefore known as 'Madhusudhana', the 'Killer of demon Madhu'. Arjuna wants to indicate that he is not faced with such a simpler choice of fighting and killing a demon. He has to fight and kill his own kith and kin. By calling Krishna as such, Arjuna is telling that his ordeal is far greater and different than that of Krishna."

"Aiya, what is wrong with Arjuna's statement? To kill someone, that too your own friends and family is a gruesome act. Instead of that, why can't he give-up and walk away? After all, nonviolence or **ahimsā** is the important moral compass in Vedas, is it not?"

"This is how a person with deluded intellect would create advocacy for escaping from the righteousness. Arjuna is now emotionally blackmailing himself that the attachment is supreme to what is right. Listen to him more to see his delusion."

Aiya continued. "By the way, we must understand that in Sanātana Dharma, 'ahimsā' is not unconditional but only an obligation at times, and at some

context. It is a dharma to be adhered in certain conditions. For example, a doctor amputating the organ to save a life or a soldier killing the enemy to protect the land or a butcher taking a life to feed others may not be seen as following ‘ahimsā’, yet their act is not considered as violence as their motives are not evil. Similarly, although any war is a tragedy, the acts of those who are rightfully engaged in a war are not seen as violating the dharma“

We witnessed the narration by Sanjaya on what Arjuna was telling Krishna.

nihatya dhārtarāṣṭrāṇnah kā prītiḥ syājjanārdana .
pāpamevāśrayedasmānhatvaitānātatāyinah (1.36)

tasmānnārha vayam hantuṁ dhārtarāṣṭrāṇsvabāndhavān .
svajanaṁ hi kathaṁ hatvā sukhinaḥ syāma mādhava (1.37)

“By killing the sons of Dhritarashtra, what pleasure we will get. O Janardhana? Sin alone will befall us if we kill these aggressors (1.36);

Therefore it does not befit us to kill the sons of Dhritarashtra and all our relations. Certainly O Madhava, how can we be happy by killing our own people (1.37)!“

Aiya said, “Watch, now Arjuna is talking in first-person plural. He wants Krishna to have the empathy. This is how deluded mind will bring advocacy.”

I was keenly observing what Arjuna was saying.

yadyapyete na paśyanti lobhopahatacetasah .
kulakṣayakṛtam doṣam mitradrohe ca pātakam (1.38)

kathaṁ na jñeyamasmbhiḥ pāpādasmānnivartitum .
kulakṣayakṛtam doṣam prapaśyadbhirjanārdana (1.39)

kulakṣaye praṇāśyanti kuladharmāḥ sanātanāḥ .
dharme naṣte kulaṁ kr̄tsnamadharmo'bhibhavatyuta (1.40)

“Even though they do not perceive, with minds lost to greed, the fallibility of destroying their own family and the disloyalty to their own friends (1.38);

But why should we, who know the sin of destroying the family, for the sake of

avoiding the sin, O Janardhana, turn away from this sin? (1.39);

*With the destruction of the family, the order of the family (**graḥa-dharma**) and the society (**loka-dharma**) are lost. The whole family transforms itself into disarray and immoral conduct (**adharma**). (1.40)."*

I noticed that Arjuna started to talk about the potential calamities for the family and therefore eventually for the whole society.

adharmābhībhavātkṛṣṇa praduṣyanti kulastriyah .
strīṣu duṣṭāsu vāṛṣṇeya jāyate varṇasaṅkaraḥ (1.41)

saṅkaro narakāyaiva kulaghnānāṁ kulasya ca .
patanti pitaro hyeṣāṁ luptapiṇḍodakakriyāḥ (1.42)

doṣairetaih kulaghnānāṁ varṇasaṅkarakārakaiḥ .
utsādyante jātidharmāḥ kuladharmāśca śāsvatāḥ (1.43)

utsannakuladharmāṇāṁ manuṣyāṇāṁ janārdana .
narake niyatāṁ vāso bhavaṭītyanuśruṭa (1.44)

aho bata mahatpāpaṁ kartum vyavasitā vayam .
yadrājyasukhalobhena hantum svajanamudyatāḥ (1.45)

yadi māmapratikāramaśastrāṇāṁ śastrapāṇayaḥ .
dhārtarāṣṭrā rāṇe hanyustanme kṣematarāṇi bhavet (1.46)

"With the emergence of adharma, O Krishna, women become impure. And when women fall into immoral ways of conduct, O descendent of Vrisni, admixture of castes takes place (1.41);

The violation of social fabrics leads to the destruction of family-values and also lead the family to hell. (As a result) The ancestors (in the heaven) also fall, as they do not receive the ritualistic offerings of food and water due to them. (1.42);

As a consequence from the misdeeds of these destroyers of family and order of the castes, the order (dharma) of the community and of the family are permanently destroyed (1.43);

O Janardhana, I have heard from others that those men whose destroy their

family order (dharma) would always dwell in hell (I.44);

Oh, how strange it is that we have got into this act of committing such a great sin, out of greed for enjoying royal pleasures, by trying to kill our own people (I.45)!

It is much better if the sons of Dhritarashtra, armed with weapons, kill me when I am unarmed and not in a mood to fight and take revenge (I.46)!"

Aiya said "Now you can see Arjuna is bringing all sort of arguments to justify his position. When we are grieving deeply, our intellect is deluded and certainly our sense of judgement will fail. The mind is also not conducive to take advice; instead the deluded intellect will only seek to escape. It will look for excuses and advocacy and support from others. Here Arjuna is bringing all sorts of rationale, for example, quoting on the plight of young wives and children who might be orphaned as the result of war and as a result, the risk of them following evil ways for their livelihood, thereby the morality of the society as a whole would tarnish etc. Thus pleading to Krishna, Arjuna is trying to convince himself and gain Krishna's approval that the evils of war should now be totally accepted and the fighting to be avoided at all costs."

"Aiya, would that not a great sacrifice by Arjuna and the war would have been averted?"

"The opportunities for taking such decisions have all long gone. This is no more a fight of Arjuna as a person. He is given a role to play to fight for the righteousness, and therefore it is not the personal whims of Arjuna that matter, but the performance of his role. Keep focus on our learning objective: how do we untangle from the emotional attachments and delusion risks, while performing what we rightfully own as our role."

sañjaya uvāca .

evamuktvārjunaḥ saṅkhye rathopastha upāviśat .
visṛjya saśaram cāpaṇ śokasamvignamānasah (I.47)

Said Sanjaya, "Saying thus amidst the battle field, Arjuna sat down in his chariot, distressed mentally by sorrow and dropping aside his bow and arrows (I.47)"

Aiya paused for a while and said, "What we have witnessed is the despondency of Arjuna, giving us the context to consider our own affairs of life, the very ordeals that we face to become the turning point for our progress. This we should contemplate before going further."

I was waiting for Aiya to continue.

§ Turning Point

Aiya said.

“Can’t you see yourself in the context of Arjuna? How often are you confused in your decision making, weighed down by the burdens of grief and the underlying cause of emotional attachments? Do you see any parallel?”

“Yes Aiya, The bloody battlefield may not be an actual encounter in my life, hopefully not. But the anxiety, grief, despair leading to a confused state of mind, not knowing what is right and what is wrong, what decision to take etc. are quite common in all our lives. Is this the grip of samsārā?”

“Yes, this human problem is samsārā and reminding of this human problem is the purpose of the 1st chapter of Bhagavad-Gita. The bloody battlefield may not come in the same form in our lives but there are situations alike, requiring preparedness to be immune from the clutches of samsārā.”

“What do we do in such situations?”

“Do exactly what Arjuna is going to do! Surrender! Realize when your own capabilities are not going to help, seek the guidance of the able master, as the Guru and surrender to him.”

“But Arjuna did not ask the Lord for advice?”

“Yes, so far he is the one talking, exposing his deluded mind. Ironically, the confused mind and deluded intellect of Arjuna will steer Arjuna to seek the Guru. That is why the scholars have also named this first chapter of Sri Bhagavad-Gita as *Arjuna Vishāda Yoga*”

“I meant to ask you Aiya, what does it mean?”

“*Vishāda* means grief, shokā - the state of being physically and emotionally weak - sort of despondency. Here the word ‘*yoga*’ refers to the path, knowledge or the exercise. Therefore by *Vishāda Yoga*, the potential of converting our state of despair and grief to a path of progress.”

“Aiya, then don’t you think the title ‘Vishāda Yoga’ would be more generic and

appropriate, instead of specifically calling Arjuna Vishāda Yoga”, I asked.

“Good question! Samsārā grips all human-beings and therefore shokā is the default consequence for everyone. We have seen shokā comes from attachment, rāga and thus leads to many evils, particularly the delusion of mind, mohā. The inevitability of mohā is therefore given, when there is shokā. But if we can somehow avoid getting into mohā, by turning towards an escape from the root cause samsārā, that would be a great turning point. The path to perfection is called the ‘yoga’. The import of the title is that we all should use every situation in our lives as a turning point towards perfection and every experience as a learning curve.”

“Why then it is not called just Vishāda Yoga? But with the name Arjuna Vishāda Yoga?”

“Good question indeed. This turning point occurs internally within each of us based on our character and spiritual maturity. We are fortunate to have Arjuna in a deluded situation, showing the potency of converting his grief into a path of liberation. Arjuna’s grief when taken as the topic of contemplation, we understand the underlying grief, shokā and the cause, attachment - rāga. We are able to understand that converting the shokā to yoga is progress but dwelling in mohā is further entrapment into samsārā. If not Arjuna, who else offer the perfect context for the turning-point?”

Aiya paused for a while and said.

“Look, as we focus in the Gita, we should be concerned with the five characters who speak. Of course, Lord Krishna when he speaks, his words become Sri Bhagavad-Gita, so we revere Krishna as our Guru. Then there is Sanjaya, who narrates the whole Gita, seeing everything, including the thoughts and motives of others, yet remaining at a distance and unattached, So Sanjaya is like our consciousness and therefore to be listened to. That leave only other three who are all dwelling deep in samsārā.”

“Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana and Arjuna, right?”, I asked.

“Yes. Do you see a parallel of you with the King Dhritarashtra?”

“No Aiya”, I said quickly as if I wanted to avoid any association with him.

“We need to understand the context of Dhritarashtra. After all, there must be a purpose why his name is mentioned in Sri Bhagavad-Gita, that too as the very first shlokā”

“What Aiya?”

“King Dhritarashtra was physically blind. Unfortunately his wife Kantari, having overcome by ignorance and self-pity, had taken the vow to remain blind-folded too; thus instead of being a guide and a moral compass to her husband, Kantari’s delusion has rendered her life to be a blind leading the blind. Dhritarashtra’s fall into the deep pit of samsārā comes from his blind-attachment. Did you notice how he stressed the point ‘my children’ while asking Sanjayan. All along, his deep attachment to his own children and consequent actions as well as inactions out of delusion has eroded his sense of judgement. His morality and righteousness, although present in some form, had become so week that he was forever falling in the wrong side of things.”

“Are you saying that the grief of Dhritarashtra is not offering a turning point to liberation?”

“When we are blinded by our emotions, we often let go our moral compasses just for the sake of those emotional attachments. When we thus give up righteousness, there is no sight of turning point from shokā to yoga.”

Aiya continued.

“We must see Dhritarashtra as the personification of the ill - ‘mamakāra’ - the emotional attachment as ‘my people, my object’ etc. Such weakness will turn one into a **tāmasic** person one who is introverted, depressed, fearful and shy of action, especially not doing the right-thing. So Dhritarashtra’s Vishāda cannot offer a lesson for us.”

“What about Duryodhana?”

“His was the other extreme of passion. His egoity (**madhā**) and envy (**mācharya**) boost and fuel his rage (**krodhā**) - all adding and deepening his delusion, Predominantly, if Dhritarashtra is taken to represent the ill of ‘mamakāra’, then we can deem Duryodhana representing the ill of **‘ahamkāra**’ - the vain ego. When there is such ego and delusion, one would even boast one’s ill qualities as inherent merits. Have you not seen some saying proudly ‘I am

short-tempered, I know everything etc. Delusion is so deep that they don't see a need for a turning-point. Don't be fooled by other good qualities in such people. Duryodhana too had few good qualities. He was a good husband, a good friend and loyal to his own attachments. But what pushed him away from the righteousness was his ego. He was full of passionate actions, '*rājasic*' in character. When deluded, such actions will only push one further into the deep pits of samsārā. We will surely learn more about these tāmasic and rājasic qualities. For now, know that Duryodhana's grief does not offer a context for learning about the turning point to redeem from misery."

"Aiya, I submit that I have both mamkāra and ahamkāra like these too".

"We all have in some form or other! Don't worry, if we are able to recognise these follies, then naturally a need to move away from these will occur to us. Then we will surely seek to counter and balance these blemishes with goodness as it will prove to be the only way of cleansing ourselves. That's is why Arjuna is the only one who stands out. Others, even Yudhistrā who is knowledgeable and always remained as a follower of righteousness is not the one receiving the Gita directly from the Lord. It is because, no one other than Arjuna has reached the turning-point."

"Are you saying Aiya, the turning point is not possible even if you follow righteousness"

"No, I am saying that the turning point is possible only when you recognize that you are trapped in grief and as the result of grief, you attain a particular state of mind that turns towards perfection. A change of heart needs the grace of God"

"So grief is a blessing...?"

"Yes, if you are able to understand the potentials that it offer."

"What is the state of mind that one should get to recognize the turning-point?"

"You will see, even Arjuna has not yet reached such a state of mind yet and that's why he feels defeated. Luckily, he has recognized that he is trapped in samsārā."

"Aiya, therefore recognition of Samsāra is the first step"

"Yes, The over arching Samsāra is found to be the issue to be sorted. The analy-

sis also showed that the problem is not a gross one to be solved by gross solution but subtle, as it is all about the mental approach to life; thus the requirement is for subtler techniques and knowledge which can only be gained from the Sad-guru, well versed in the scriptural knowledge. The sign of recovery is when one recognizes the need of help and the start of an intense search for the Guru”

“Aiya, Why then Arjuna did not ask directly to the Lord for the way out?”

“Well, it takes time. Arjuna so far has not approached Krishna as if Krishna is the Guru. To him, Krishna is a reverent friend and now the charioteer. Did you not notice that the Lord spoke nothing at all so far? Until Arjuna is ready to surrender to the Guru, Arjuna’s preparedness for learning the supreme truth is not done. Hopefully it happens soon”

“Yes Aiya, Krishna has not spoken so far”

“Yes, even in his silence, there is eloquence. Krishna is hearing the grief of Arjuna. In such contexts, the right thing to do is to give a sincere hearing. We need to learn such qualities. One should not give advice unless one is asked.”

I concurred in my mind.

“Aiya, I can’t wait to witness the transformation in Arjuna as a disciple and how the Lord imparts the words of wisdom”

“Yes, that is why Bhagavad-Gita is called the ‘*Moksha-Sāstra*’ or the ‘guide to liberation’. The problem of Samsāra can never be solved by self-study of scriptures; it is only possible by total surrender to Guru. That is why Bhagavad-Gita must be studied under the Guru.”

“Are we going to find the teacher in the Lord, and the teaching in the Bhagavad-Gita?”

“Well, that is up to us. The foremost requirement is that we must recognize that we are trapped in samsārā. This recognition largely occurs when we are in a dire situation but it does not need to be so. Even when we are enjoying life, we must recognize the impermanence of such pleasures and grief that our attachments could lead to. Only when we realize that we are trapped in samsārā, we seek to be free.”

“When will such thirst for true liberation come to us? When will we see the Guru?”

Aiya looked at me intensely for a minute or so.

“Listen, the importance of the first chapter of Gita is exactly for triggering such a quest. Hereinafter, we have to take the words of Lord as the *Gita-Upadesam* as if it is imparted to each one of us. It is because the problem that Arjuna faces is common to all. But to see a Guru and to have the guidance requires certain ‘*yogyatha*’ or ‘qualifications’ like that of Arjuna. Before we start again tomorrow, please reflect on these requirements to become like Arjuna.”

“I don’t understand Aiya! *samsārā* is a human problem and the grief and delusion due to desires and emotional attachment apply to everyone. In that sense, I can easily see myself as Arjuna. I do have delusion like that of Arjuna.”

“Well, that is a good start. The most fundamental cause of *samsārā* is due to the delusion of ‘Self-identity’. We do not recognize who we really are. Each of us holds on to a personal identity, the ‘I’ and with emotional attachment to things that we consider our own – like ‘mine’. The errors in the self-identity known as ‘*ahamkārā*’ and the fallacy of ownership as ‘*mamakārā*’ are the common delusion that we all suffer. In that respect, yes, we are like Arjuna and deluded.”

I was listening.

“But there is another type of delusion which has elevated Arjuna to seek liberation. Do you realize that?”

“What is that Aiya?”

“Here the delusion of Arjuna is about the action that he has to do. He wants to be righteous in his action. That is very important. The desire to be virtuous and to do the right thing, combined with the delusion of not knowing what the right and righteous thing is in a way a blessing; such a delusion is a positive trigger to realize our helplessness and the necessity to seek noble guidance.”

“I understand Aiya. I too have such moral conflicts or ‘*dharma sangatam*’ in discharging my duties sometimes. But never saw in such situations to seek a spiritual guru”

“Well, if you also have this type of delusion about choosing the righteous path, that is great. But then to convert such grief and delusion into a yoga or *sādhanā* for greater knowledge, one needs certain important qualifications like that of Arjuna. Those qualifications are mandatory to receive supreme knowledge contained in the Vedas”

“What are these Aiya? What evidences are there that Arjuna had such qualities? Please explain”

“The foremost is called *Vivekā* – the discriminating intellect that one is able to apply to infer the nature of a thing – whether it is temporal or permanent. This requires learning as well as keen observation of all things around and also from life-experiences.”

“Are you talking about death?”

“I am talking about the temporal nature of things. All that we see and experience are not permanent. Everything that appears must disappear. What was not before, even though it is now, will not be in the future. Don’t you see?”

“Of course Aiya! Such temporal nature is understood. But that is life and we only have to deal with what we have – temporal objects!”

“Sure, living necessarily involves transacting with temporal objects. But if temporal nature of things is forgotten while transacting, we invite undue grief and despair.”

“So what we should do Aiya?”

“*Vivekā* should lead to ‘*Vairāgyā*’ or ‘dispassion towards things that are temporal in nature’. Dispassion is not dislike or lack of interest in the things. It is the absence of emotional attachment.”

“Aiya, sometime we feel such *vairāgyā* when there is tragedy, such as when the loved ones depart the world. But then we recoup!”

“When we become unattached or dispassionate only because of such personal loss or some distress, then it is not *vairāgyā*, may be we can say ‘*vrakti*’, a loss of interest on the thing. *vairāgyā* should be borne out of *vivekā* only.”

I was listening intently.

“Arjuna has a sharp discriminating intellect. He applies his vivekā and this shows how deeply he has analysed things. He also demonstrates vairāgyā. To him, the glories of being a King or all luxuries that come with it are impermanent. He is keen to give-up such pleasures, knowing their temporal nature. You can see many evidences for his Vivekā and vairāgyā in his appeal to Krishna. Although he is confused in what to do next, he has come to that delusion only after applying his vivekā and vairāgyā.”

After a momentary pause, Aiya Said, “You should always cultivate intellectual scrutiny of all things and life situations, and be dispassionate about things, even though you need to transact with those in carrying out your life’s duties.”

“Yes, Aiya, I realize that I have a long way to go to sharpen my intellect and upholding a dispassionate approach to things in life! Aiya, are these two the essential qualities to receive the supreme knowledge?”

“These two are fundamental. But when these are achieved, then it is possible to cultivate a set of six important character changes. These are to be intently monitored and nurtured”

“What are those Aiya?”

“See, even though you have **vivekā** to discriminate the true nature of things, it is not easy to develop **vairāgyā** especially when you are emotionally attached. But if you analyse, it is the ‘mind’ that fuels the desire and attachments. Therefore one should have ‘control of mind’ or ‘**kshama**’ as it is known.”

“How done one control the mind Aiya?”

“Control is not stopping the mind from thinking. No one can do that. Here ‘control’ means ‘to regulate’ thoughts. The first **yoga-sutrā** of Sage Patanjali even defines yoga as the process of regulating thoughts: **yoga: citta vritti niroda:** Regulating thoughts is tuning the mind towards virtuous thoughts. This is possible with practice, firstly by nurturing good thoughts at all times; subjecting oneself in the company of virtuous and good people at all times is a great enabler. Yoga, **Japa** and such mental exercises also help to control the mind. One who controls the mind, remains forever as the observer of the mind. It is perpetual progress”.

“Aiya, I try to control my mind, for example, while doing meditation. But I am always distracted by everything around me. It is proving to be hard”

“Well, that is why to control the mind, you must first develop control over your senses. This second refinement is ‘*damā*’ or ‘sense control’. Sensory organs must, and are always expected to, do their job of bringing sensory-triggers and enticing the mind to engage in sensory objects. So, by ‘*damā*’, the muting of sensory organs is not inferred but the ability of the mind to filter or selectively ignore any or all such sensory pulses. So both *kshamā* and *damā* go hand in hand.”

“I understand Aiya. Such controls could be probably practiced at set times everyday, but as we have to earn a living and so engage in lots of actions, what happens then? “

“There is no conflict. In fact, with *kshamā* and *damā*, your control on the task on hand only improves. But, there is also a point in your question. One has to slowly but surely give up those actions that may dilute one’s spiritual purpose in life. Giving up such actions, even if that would mean giving up on some material comforts in life, is a great virtue. It is in fact, the third qualification, known as ‘*uparamā*’.”

“hmm... That would be a challenge. There is no issue with giving up tasks that are clearly evil but giving up tasks that we like, just because those do not promote our spiritual progress is tough”.

“Sure, granted. Krishna is going to tell us how to handle such tasks also. By a simple shift in our attitude, we can continue to do any necessary task – yet being spiritually focused.”

I was bit assured by those comforting words.

“What else we need Aiya, I remember you were saying six qualities”

“Yes, when you start developing these qualities, *kshamā*, *damā*, *uparamā* – you also have the need to show forbearance to all sorts of emotions – joy or grief. It is not that you should be insensitive to happiness or sadness, but you have to bear them and not be destroyed by those. A ‘balanced approach’ to all good and bad..... it is called ‘*titiksha*’. Having a composed posture, both internally and externally, irrespective of the situation is the mark of great spiritual progress. This is the fourth important quality.”

“And the fifth is?”

“The absolutely essential one to be a good student. It is called ‘*shraddā*’.”

“*Shraddā* means believing in what is said by the teacher, is it not?”

“No, belief is never a demand on the students but the commitment is. The term ‘*shraddā*’ refers to ‘the intensity of purpose’ and unwavering commitment to learning, especially when what is taught does not correspond to one’s own experience. When the teaching does not conform to your own experience or beliefs, if you do not have *shraddā*, you will give up the learning. If you have *shraddā*, you will accept what is taught is true but your capacity to understand the truth in the teaching is still incomplete. Therefore your focus to achieve the complete learning increases with *shraddā*”

“Aiya, what happens if Guru is teaching incorrect things? or if the Guru is fake? Such risk exists, is it not?”

“Possible! But *shraddā* is not used alone as it is always combined with *vivekā*. So in such unfortunate events, your search for an able teacher will continue. But there should be no loss to your *shraddā*.”

Aiya hastened to add.

“When you get these essential qualities of *Sishyā*, the moment you seek the Guru, you will find him, at once!”

I deposited those assuring words deep into my heart.

“What else I need to earn Aiya?”

“Well, if you are steadfast in these qualities, you are already a great spiritual aspirant. You will have pure mind, unwavering with the ability to focus on ‘anything for any long’, able to expand and comprehend any lofty thought. Such a ‘state of equipoise’ is called ‘*Samādāna*’, the ability to remain with tranquil mind. It is the sixth qualification.”

Aiya continued.

“Arjuna had all these qualities. By Krishna calling him as the one with the mas-

terry over sleep, Arjuna's control over his senses is inferred. His long penance, his ability to focus etc. demonstrate his control over his mind. Listen, it is time that we turn the focus on our selves; we should start searching for such noble qualities within us and if not, start developing such qualities; we need those to earn the supreme Guru for our spiritual pursuits”.

“Aiya, if Arjuna has all qualities, then why has not Krishna shown himself as his Guru? Why is Krishna letting Arjuna to suffer? If I earn all such qualities, what is the guarantee that the Lord will come as my Guru?”

“Well, Arjuna has all qualities. Yet he did not exhibit the last and the most important requirement”

“What is that Aiya?”

“That is the ‘desire for liberation’, ‘**mumukshutvam**’. So far, Arjuna has only expressed his own views and some lofty ideals, only to avoid his rightful duty. He is yet to ask for a way out to be free”

“Will he ask?”

“He will! That will come only when he realizes that there is nothing he can do by himself and he needs help. This particular state-of-mind is the actual turning-point. When that happens, he will surrender and at the very moment, there will be the Guru”

I was completely still at the potency of what I hear so far

Aiya continued.

“But it is not easy. To give up ego and offer oneself totally to the mercy of the teacher requires a lot of spiritual strength. Our egoity is an impediment to take that bold step. Let us see what Arjuna will do”.

The night was gently folding as the rays of the Sun dawned in the East.

Aiya walked away with the promise to meet again the next night, to pursue our journey.

I simply could not wait!

om tatsaditi śrīmadbhagavadgītāśūpaniṣatsu
brahmavidyāyāṁ yogaśāstre śrīkṛṣṇārjunasaṁvāde
arjunaviśādayogo nāma prathamo'dhyāyah (1)



Thus ends the first chapter named the

'Yoga of Arjuna's despondency'

in the Upanishad of the divine Bhagavad-Gita , the knowledge of the Absolute
as the divine conversation between Arjuna and Lord Krishna.

Previous
Introduction

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Part - 01



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Sri Bhagavad-Gita
The Honey-Elixir for Humanity



02: Sāṅkhyā Yoga
Supreme Knowledge Through Virtuous Actions

(Learning Through Conversation)

Prior reading of earlier chapter is recommended

Mee. Rajagopalan

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25 March 2020

Version 2.0

o2: Sāṅkhyā Yoga

Supreme Knowledge Through Virtuous Actions



O2: Sāṅkhyā Yoga

§ Chapter o2

The golden rays of the setting Sun was reflecting on the flowing waters of river Ganges as the trees on the banks were silently absorbing the fading light. Evening was slowly warping into early night and I had come to meet Aiya for our journey to Kurukshetra and witness the divine conversation between Arjuna and Krishna.

Since seeing the plight of Arjuna and his despondency earlier, I have become restless to know what the turning-point for Arjuna would be and how he gained Krishna as his Guru and his teaching for freedom.

I reminded myself of what Aiya had earlier said: the journey for witnessing the imparting of Sri Bhagavad-Gita is the dwelling on one's own existence for inquiring one's true nature, where one reigns in absolute freedom. Frankly, I am yet to

understand what this ‘self-discovery’ really means or how such a pursuit would help our affairs in this world. Yet I am totally committed to explore and truly enchanted with the journey, thanks to Aiya for the stewardship.

“Welcome”, said Aiya.

“Are you ready? To make any sense of what we are about to witness, you must remember what all we saw earlier”, Aiya looked curiously. It meant that I must, by then, have gained a good understanding of what has been imparted so far.

“Surely Aiya, driven by emotional attachments, we often get into situations that weaken our resolve to take up or complete our endeavour. Grief and fear filling the mind, and such ‘*shokā*’ overpowering, the intellect becomes clouded, not able to see things as they are. Thus deluded, one finds decision making difficult. Worse is, in such situations, not knowing that one is deluded, one may keep on making wrong decisions, believing as doing the right things. That entraps us in more grief.”

I continued with some hesitation.

“I saw Arjuna in such situation. Of course, his situation is so dire that he has to make a decision at the middle of the battlefield. If one’s action is going to bring tragic consequences to one’s own kith and kin, should one pursue such action? This is the core of his grief, is it not Aiya?”

“Yes. In Arjuna’s case, the focus is ‘to fight’. Bhagavān Sankara in his elucidation translates this as ‘to perform’. To perform one’s role with clear mind, freewill and love should be everyone’s focus, failing of which we get trapped in grief- the grip of *Samsārā*”

Aiya continued.

“Yet ‘sorrow’ can be used as a positive trigger to reorient our life-goals and refine our approach and actions. This subtler insight is what we must understand to turn adversity into achievement. We always blame on, and attempt to fix, external situations to escape from our grief, but the real cure requires internal fix – to our mind.”

“Like what?”

“Say you get stress by seeing a person who you do not get along with, then your likely fix is to avoid seeing that person. Surely, it gives some relief but it also weakens your freedom. You will still get stressed when the thought of such person comes to your mind. Where then is your freedom? So trying to change external situation is futile. Unless you are able to address and remove the hatred (*dveshā*), a negative form of *rāgā* in your mind, you have not solved the issue.”

“May be, but we all cannot be so saintly and start loving those who do bad things”

“You misunderstand. If you need to get rid of evil things, do what you need to do. Positive action is needed. But your action should be driven by ‘the purpose’ but not ‘hate’ or ‘attachment’ bias. ‘Freedom-in-action’ is the capacity to do what you need to do, freely, clearly and without any fear, do you see the point?’.

“Yes, this is where the dispassion or *vairāgya* comes into play, is it not?”

“Yes, I am asking you all these questions only to prepare for what we are about to witness. Arjuna’s turning point will appear to him only when he gives up his vain efforts of fiddling with external fixes and ducking his due action. He must recognize the need for internal-fixes; to achieve freedom-in-actions, he needs help in knowing what these internal fixes are, as these are subtler in their application. Do you know what these are?”, asked Aiya.

“I don’t know Aiya and I want to know”

“Well, that is the best statement to become a good student. Knowing that you do not know is a good thing. When one says ‘I do not know’, then one gains infinite potentials to know, is that not the best position to take?”

“Yes Aiya”

“But we do not easily accept our ignorance. At least upon the realization, that one’s mind and intellect are not helping, one must look for guidance. Nothing wrong with trying to solve by self-effort, but there comes a time to seek help.”

“I see the parallels Aiya! Arjuna has been all along advocating all sorts of reasons for not taking up his role; but if Arjuna stands for what he says, then why doesn’t he leave the battlefield with a clear-head and conviction! Perhaps Arjuna recognizes his delusion and therefore is his lack of conviction, correct Aiya?”

“Yes, he knows that he has a problem; now he also knows that the problem is not addressable by using his own faculties, although he tried to argue for those. It is like discovering that one has a serious illness and upon knowing, one tries many cures using one’s own knowledge and means alone.”

“That is necessary also”, I said.

“Yes, some don’t even try and simply accept the onslaught of suffering. That is also no good. However when one realizes that one’s own efforts are not bringing the cure, there must be search for help”

“That is, if there is a cure for it, is it not?”

“Well, that is an important point. In order to seek the cure, you must first know, and strongly believe, that there is a cure. Here we are concerned about Samsārā which grips us with all sort of mental ailments and for which the scriptures vouch for a permanent cure. This assurance of freedom from Samsārā is available to everyone in the world. Hail the glory of this statement! Every one of us can be eternally free – that guarantee is given! So you are right, one must know that there is a cure from all fear, grief and delusion.”

“I guess Arjuna has already realized that with his deluded mind, he can’t escape his grief, so will he now seek a cure?” I asked knowing well that he would.

“Yes, what makes Arjuna to give up his own futile efforts and to turn towards the teacher for his progress is an important and subtle knowledge that we want to capture next”

“I am eager to learn Aiya”.

“Well, keep up your reserves. This is going to be the most beautiful and long night, because the message of whole Bhagavad-Gita which is the essence of Vedānta is delivered tonight by the Lord in his few words of wisdom.”

“Aiya, is not Gita in 18 chapters?”

“Yes, but the solution to Samsārā is given straightaway, now. Only for its true understanding and application, Arjuna brings lot more questions! Thanks to him, we all get greater elucidation. As a compassionate teacher, Krishna delivers ‘the solution’ to Samsārā, and then elaborates how one must acquire the qualifications to understand and apply for redemption, before summarizing everything

at the end. That is why I am saying, this night is for our grand illumination.”

“You think I will be able to understand?”

“Hear and hold on to the knowledge first. Empty your mind to fill it up with what you are about to hear. Surely like a seed that germinates, understanding will blossom”.

With a smile, Aiya cautioned.”But be warned, you will be constantly tested for the strength of your ‘*shraddā*’ because what you hear may not always conform to your current knowledge and experience. You have to think afresh. So listen and absorb.”

Aiya sat down under the tree and I too parked myself nearby.

“Be calm and relaxed. May we pray for the benign grace of the Lord and the great Seers for endowing us with tranquillity of mind and sharpness of intellect for the absorption of knowledge; May we have the strength to assimilate! May we recite the enchanting prayers on Sri Bhagavad-Gita, rendered by the great soul, Sri Madhusudhana Saraswathi”

Saying thus, Aiya closed his eyes and started reciting the shlokā. I too joined him.

The Sun-set was complete and the stars-studded blanket of night was gently spread.

§ Prayer 2

Om

*namostu te vyāsa viśālabuddhe phullāravindāyatapatranetra |
yena tvayā bhāratatailapūrṇaḥ prajvālito jñānamayaḥ pradipaḥ || 2 ||*

Salutations O Vyasa (the compiler), one with the great intellect, with eyes like the petals of fully blossomed lotus, who has filled up the oil to the lamp of Mahabharata, and lighted for its effulgence, granting the supreme wisdom.

We prayed to 'Veda Vyasa', who heads the lineage of teachers - **Guru parampara** - in the Sanātana-Dharma. How wonderful it is that his original name is also 'Krishna', only for his mammoth task of cataloguing the Vedas into four, namely (**rig, yajur, sāma, atharva**), he is famously known as 'Veda Vyasa'.

Besides cataloguing the Vedas, Vyasa authored many scriptural texts and Purāna, the two most notable contributions being: '**Brahma-Sutra**', a coded summary of the essence of Vedanta and 'Mahabharata', as the fully exploded presentation of the import of Vedanta, and which contains 'Sri Bhagavad-Gita'.

Sage Veda Vyasa is worshipped as none other than the Lord Krishna Himself.

He is therefore the ocean of supreme knowledge; his eyes of wisdom, blossomed as the petal of beautiful lotus, lighted the lamp of Mahabharata, powering it with the oil of great human-history, so that the enduring lustre of the lamp dispels all our ignorance, the root cause of Samsārā.

Reciting the prayer and contemplating on its essence, I remained with my eyes closed. On the canvas of my mind, emerged the scene of Kurukshetra, coming alive by Sanjaya's narrations and the insightful interludes of Aiya.



§ Surrender

sañjaya uvāca :
tam tathā kṛpayāviṣṭamaśrupūrṇākulēkṣaṇam
viṣidantamidaṁ vākyamuvāca madhusūdanah (2.1)

“Sanjaya said:

To him (Arjuna) who was thus overcome by the weakening-compassion, with eyes filled with tears and agitated, the destroyer of Madhu (Krishna) spoke as follows: (2.1)

Aiya said.

“Nothing has changed since we saw Arjuna. Earlier we have seen him overcome with sympathy and now afflicted by a sort of undue tenderness of heart, a ‘weakening-compassion’, making him vulnerable.”

“Will Krishna say something now?”

“When we are in helpless situations there is always the will of God showing us the ways and means to progress, but only those who seek the grace of God are able to see such turning-points that may present themselves in various forms. Yes, Arjuna is gaining such an opportunity as his friend and charioteer Krishna intervenes.”

śrībhagavānuvāca :

kutastvā kaśmalamidaṁ viṣamē samupasthitam
anāryajuṣṭamasvargyamakīrtikaramarjuna (2.2)

klaibyam mā sma gamah pārtha naitattvayyupapadyatē
kṣudram hṛdayadaurbalyam tyaktvōttiṣṭha parantapa (2.3)

“The Bhagavān said :

O Arjuna, whence in (this) perilous strait has come upon you this weakness cherished (only) by the uncultured (unārya), debarring from heaven and causing disgrace? (2.2);

Yield not to impotence, o son of Partha! It does not suit you! Discard this base weakness of heart and arise (to perform your duty), o tormentor of foes! (2.3)"

"Aiya, why does the Lord speak thus? He is talking as if he did not hear any of Arjuna's concerns?", I asked as I was expecting some comforting words from the Lord.

"When one is depressed and dull, offering sobering words of consolation is not going to make one wake-up from the slumber of delusion. Jolting words indeed are required to inject the fighting spirit to face the ordeals of life. Krishna does exactly that. In piquant terms, he calls Arjuna as 'impotent', knowing well that it would hurt him and make him look at his situation differently. Arjuna who is a tormentor of foes cannot be trembling in a battlefield which will only bring disgrace. For the warriors, glory is paramount. That is why Krishna is striking hard with his words. A friend in need is a friend indeed!"

Aiya continued. "When we are depressed, what we need is not solace or mere empathy, but words that strike hard to bring out the fighting-spirit in us. Krishna is also talking as Arjuna's charioteer. They came together to fight and fight they should do. Also notice, Krishna is not offering any advice to Arjuna because Arjuna has not sought for it! One should never offer advice to others unless it is asked for. We tend to freely give advice to those with whom we are attached, even when they do not ask for it. Such acts offer no benefit to any"

"Aiya, what is the meaning of the word 'Bhagavān'? Here Sanjaya refers to Krishna as Bhagavān. I know great sages are also referred as Bhagavān."

"Well, the term '**Bhagavān**', these days, is generally translated as Lord or God. Traditionally also, the term is used as an honorific title for a spiritual leader considered fully enlightened by their followers. The suffix '**vān**' denotes 'enduring nature', like a '**danavān**' who has enduring wealth and not just temporal riches. The prefix '**Bhag**' indicates opulence of six types namely: dominion or the leadership, might, glory, splendour, wisdom and, in spite of all the above, complete dispassion. This is declared by Parasara, the son of Vyasa, in Vishnu Purana (6.5.74), '*aiśvaryasya samagrasya vīryasya yaśasah śriyah | jñāna-vairāgyayoś caiva ṣaṇḍāṁ bhagam itīnranā ||*'. Krishna who displayed all such opulence is thus hailed as Bhagavān"

"Aiya, I also want to know why does Krishna say Arjuna is '**unāryan**' like"?

“The term ‘*ārya*’ refers to a ‘cultured and civilized’ person - a noble person who stands for higher ideals and who keeps up with the vows. When Arjuna is displaying the tendency to give up fighting, Krishna reminds him that it does not suit the character of a noble person.”

“Is not the term ‘*Ārya*’ referring to the invaders who entered into India and drove the native ‘*Dravida*’ from the north?”

“Such notions exist without any basis. The two terms ‘*ārya*’ and ‘*dravida*’ cannot even be compared as each has different meaning. The term ‘dravida’ refers to a peninsular region, which is covered by sea waters on all three sides, while ‘*ārya*’ refers to nobility. Therefore everyone living in peninsular India is ‘dravidian’. However, no matter where one lives, irrespective of the race, colour or creed, one must aspire to become and remain as ‘*āryan*’ by leading a noble and civilized life. All other interpretations on these two terms are utterly baseless and useless except to create disharmony in the minds of people.”

“I understand Aiya”, saying thus I refocused on the canvas of my mind.

arjuna uvāca :

kathaṁ bhīṣmamahaṁ saṅkhyē drōṇam ca madhusūdana
iṣubhiḥ pratiyōtsyāmi pūjārhāvarisūdana (2.4)

“Arjuna said:

O slayer of Madhu, by reciprocating with arrows, how shall I assail in battle against Bhism and Drona, who are worthy of worship, O slayer of enemies! (2.4)”

“Notice how carefully Arjuna uses his words. He is still adamant that he will not start the fight; if arrows were to be fired by Bhism and Drona towards him, even then he is unsure if he would reciprocate in the battle against Bhism and Drona, who he dearly reveres”.

Aiya continued. “Also he calls Krishna as ‘Madusudhana’ meaning one who killed the demon Madhu and ‘Arisudhana’, one who killed the enemies. This he does only to stress that his ordeal is different, as he is not dealing with the demons or enemies.”

“Demons I understand, but is not Arjuna facing the enemies!”

“Indeed, but you see, Arjuna is often quoting Bhism and Drona. To him, they are not enemies even though they are against him! See how far he is pushing this attachment to drop out of his duties!”

I was witnessing.

gurūnahatvā hi mahānubhāvān
 śrēyō bhōktum bhaikṣyamapīha lōkē
 hatvārthakāmāṁstu gurūnihaiva
 bhuñjiya bhōgān rudhirapradigdhān (2.5)

“Desisting from the slaying of the highly honourable teachers, better indeed in this world to live even upon alms; But, if I were to slay these teachers, then I should only in this world feast on the blood-stained pleasures of wealth and delights (2.5)”

“Aiya, what has been really troubling Arjuna seems to come out now! He is mainly worried about fighting against his teachers, is he not?”

“Yes, also notice that his confidence in his prowess is still intact. Defeat is not in his dictionary. If he fights, he will slay them. But he considers such victory to be stained with the sin of killing the teachers. So he is ready to give up the war and by doing so, he will not get his kingdom. In such case, he is happy to live in this world, by begging for food.”

“Aiya, is begging honourable?”

“Well, here Arjuna is electing to live by alms but only after, like a ‘*sanyāsi*’, taking to renunciation and giving all his possessions to others. That is a noble act and not to be considered at par with ‘begging’ due to poverty or as a lowly means to earn without working. Arjuna is demonstrating that he does not prefer ‘material pleasures’ or ‘*preyas*’ in this world but only ‘goodness’ or the ‘*sreyas*’. So what Arjuna is electing to do must be deemed as a supremely honourable act but is it the right thing for him to do? That is the question he has not answered for himself yet. The good news is that instead of being a depressed person, he is now gaining some clarity to refine what choices are available to him. That is progress. Listen to him.”

na caitadvidmaḥ katarannō garīyō¹
yadvā jayēma yadi vā nō jayēyuḥ
yānēva hatvā na jijīviṣāmas.
tē'vasthitāḥ pramukhē dhārtarāṣṭrāḥ (2.6)

"And we do not know which is the better alternative for us of the two: 1) living upon alms collected from everywhere without slaying others, or 2) fighting the enemy which is our duty; nor do we know whether we shall conquer them or they will conquer us. Even the custodians of Dhritarashtra (meaning Bhism and Drona) after killing whom we do not wish to live, stand arrayed against us. (2.6)"

"Again you see, Arjuna is offering the choice of living in alms, instead of slaying others. That means, if he were to fight, he will slay them all, as he is utterly confident. He also knows to fight is his duty. Thus he is now able to describe his problem more succinctly: to do the duty or not. How far Arjuna has reconciled to come to this point, do you see?"

"Yes Aiya, but then why does he also lament about winning or losing? Is it because he fears defeat?"

"Not at all, if he fights, he will win, that he is sure of. But if he does not elect to fight, then naturally the other side will be declared as the winners. So, he is saying the same thing: Should I do my duty or not?"

"mmm.... Looks like Arjuna knows that he must do his duty but somehow not up for it", I said without knowing what is right.

"Well, even that 'knot' is being removed. Look what he said at the end, after killing the protectors of Dhritarashtra who are arrayed to fight that Arjuna may not like to live!"

"Who does he mean by Dhritarashtra's protectors?"

"Clearly he refers to Bhism and Drona only, the two who nurtured Arjuna. So his emotional attachment to them overweighs upon his moral duty"

"That means, did he not really mean all the talk about the calamities of war, social problems, tragedy on women and such moral and ethical arguments?"

“Those were profound arguments that Arjuna had borrowed to dress up his real reason. He is clearly placing his personal wish above the duty. The nice thing is Arjuna being a noble man, he is also aware of the fallacy of his argument and therefore now comes to the conclusion that someone should clearly steer him to the right direction. His turning point is here.”

I earnestly listened.

kārpanyadōśopahatasvabhāvaḥ
pr̥cchāmi tvāṁ dharmasammūḍhacētāḥ
yacchrēyaḥ syānniścitaṁ brūhi tanmē
śisyastē’ham śādhi mām tvāṁ prapannam (2.7)

“My mind is contaminated by the taint of helplessness, my intellect confounded about Dharma, I ask you (Krishna): Teach me who have sought your grace, what is absolutely good. I am your disciple, instruct me clearly! (2.7)”

Aiya said.

“Total Surrender happens here as the transformation of Arjuna to a ‘*sishya*’ is now complete. As a result Krishna becomes his Guru. We must contemplate on what Arjuna has said.”

“Aiya, how is Arjuna’s transformation now complete?”

“Arjuna surrenders to Krishna after completely emptying his mind. He is well educated and a noble person. Yet he declares himself as a fool as he has realized that all his scholastic qualifications and skills are of no use in his situation. Only such humility and submission will make one a worthy student to receive the supreme knowledge. We cannot go to a teacher with mind full of preconceived ideas and only to reconfirm our knowledge or to judge the teacher based on our perspectives. Especially for spiritual learning, the student should start with an open mind, after emptying all preconceived notions. Arjuna’s delusion gave him the opportunity to discard all his notions. By now you must know why such a turning point occurs to Arjuna, but not to Duryodhana for example?”

I was silently looking as Aiya continued.

“Everyone whose intelligence is swayed by grief and delusion will always try to

avoid their righteous duties. Some, when they are overpowered by other evil influences, will resort to acts which are inappropriate and prohibited by the learned. Duryodhana is an example of a deluded individual who had resorted to evil pursuits. On the contrary Arjuna, although deluded and is now failing to do his duties, is not doing evil things. Do you see the difference?"

"Yes Aiya, Arjuna has been all along a follower of righteousness and so he is not influenced by evil thoughts."

"Yes, only for such virtuous people, even grief and delusion could become a turning-point for progress. Here Arjuna's helplessness which is mentioned as '*kārpanya-dosha*' provides for such a turning point."

"What is *kārpanya-doshā*?"

"It means 'helplessness', a situation when one is overwhelmed by weakening-emotion, making one incapable of offering anything as if totally impoverished. The term '*kārpanya*' comes from the word '*krupana*': one who is unyielding, or miserly in nature. The term '*dosha*' means 'blemish' so '*kārpanya-doshā*' is the blemish that results in one losing oneself in grief and becomes totally incapable of offering anything. The word '*krupā*' or 'compassion' also was used earlier to describe Arjuna's state of mind."

"Aiya, is compassion a bad thing?"

"No! Compassion out of love is adorable. It drives you to do something positive to others. But compassion out of emotional attachment and selfish desires is a burden. It weakens. It is a bias and does not lead to any positive action except driving us to more grief and depression. In such weakening compassion, one loses the mind."

"Losing the mind means?"

"Don't you use the term like 'have you lost your mind'. It means one's mind is overtaken by thoughts that are irrelevant or inappropriate. If you persistently lose your mind, you will find it difficult to perform to your full potential in life"

"How do we cope Aiya?"

"Well, losing the mind actually means losing oneself in emotions. To gain con-

trol of the mind, one must look at one's mind.”

“Don't we?”

“No, we are generally afraid to look into our minds. That is why we always focus on external things to fill our minds.”

“Why Aiya?”

“Mind is like a mirror, the scriptures say. So when we look at ourselves in the mirror of our minds, we see our blemishes which we hate to accept. That is why we are happy to fill up our mind, almost non-stop with all that is happening outside. Thus, our time passes, and slowly, we lose ourselves.”

“Is that why meditation proposed as a means to look into ourselves?”

“May be, but the foremost thing is to start regulating what goes into the mind. Before we dare to look at ourselves, let us wipe clean the mirror of mind. Like the choice of food we eat to nourish the gross-body, may good thoughts nourish the mind. We will learn about all these and the required techniques in due course. Lots of cleansing that we all need to do!”

Aiya continued.

“Let us not digress. Arjuna is now able to describe his state of mind more clearly which is important for a good aspirant”

“You mean to tell the teacher what you want to learn?”

“No, Arjuna does not know what he wants. In fact he asks Krishna to tell him clearly what he requires, except that he wants '*sreyas*' or goodness. But Arjuna is very clear on what he does not want: material pleasures or '*preyas*'. So, to become a sishya, one must be clear on what should be avoided and be prepared to give up those that may inhibit spiritual progress.”

“That is comforting Aiya, if I have to delete the material pleasures from my demands-list, I do not know exactly what I should seek. I guess that is alright”, I was looking for his confirmation.

Aiya laughed.

“Yes, As long as you develop ‘*vairāgya*’ or ‘dispassion’ on material-pleasures and ‘*shraddā*’ or ‘focused attention’ on spiritual knowledge, then you really don’t need to worry about what spiritual knowledge or goodness that you should aim for; those will be rightly imparted to you by the teacher, to whom you surrender.”

Aiya after a short pause continued.

“Surrender to the Guru or God is the strength of character and not a weakness. It should not be compared to surrendering to someone out of fear of losing one’s life or possession. That is a submission out of fear. For spiritual learning, the student actually gives up everything – including the assumptions of all previous knowledge – and like a child submitting to the Mother, surrenders to the Guru. In that sense, surrender means ‘the transference of responsibility’. Guru then takes the ownership for the welfare of the Sishya, like a mother for her child. Surrender is a gainful act, powerful act, fitting only for those who are refined in their thinking.”

Aiya, after few moments, added. “To be more precise, surrender is not an act, it is an attitude. It is because, unlike an act which has a beginning and end, surrender is an attitude or ‘*bhāvanā*’ and it is an expression of your character.”

“I understand Aiya”

“Not everyone can surrender but only those who have the courage to give themselves for the learning. In other words, one should be prepared to offer one’s intellect to Guru, for him to fill up everything afresh. That means giving up the ego. Arjuna, a cultured man with great status is willing to give-up all and live by alms. He submits his ignorance and seek clear instruction to lead his life. Thus both physically and mentally, Arjuna offers himself and this attitude demonstrates the total surrender. Such courage requires tremendous power. So never equate surrender to weakness.”

“What else we learn from his transformation Aiya?”

“Note, how now Arjuna is able to express his condition more clearly. This is possible only when one fully appraises one’s own state of mind. Arjuna indicates two problems: firstly his mind is filled with ‘*shokā*’ and secondly his intellect is afflicted by ‘*mohā*'; with such incapacitated intellect, he does not know what is ‘dharma’ or the rightful action to perform. Krishna as the teacher therefore must

address these two issues; such clear articulation to the teacher puts the student in good stead for learning.”

“So Krishna as the Guru, will answer Arjuna’s two questions, right?”

“Yes, Krishna as his teacher will provide solution to both these problems. He will offer a path of selfless-virtuous-acts (*yoga*) that will help him to cleanse his mind and also the path of true knowledge (*sāṅkhyā*) for his liberation.”

“Two different solutions or two conjoined solutions?”

“No, there is only one solution for the freedom from Samsārā – that is ‘the truth’, which is available only through the path of knowledge. This supreme knowledge is termed as ‘*sāṅkhyā*’. However, such knowledge is attainable only when One has a clear mind and stable intellect, which come by following the path of One’s duties perfectly, that is doing the duties as *yoga*. The title ‘Sāṅkhya Yoga’ thus infer these two important *sādhanā* or practices. Know thus: Realization of truth is the only solution to Samsārā. Action is only the inevitable preparatory step.”

I was watching.

na hi prapaśyāmi mamāpanudyād
yacchōkamucchōṣaṇamindriyāṇām
avāpya bhūmāvasapatnamṛddham
rājyam surāṇāmapi cādhipatyam (2.8)

“I do not indeed see what can dispel the grief which burns up my senses, even after attaining unrivalled and prosperous dominion on earth or even lordship over gods. (2.8)”

“Arjuna, who was talking once about taking to alms, now speaks about dominating the earth by wining the war and gaining lordship in the Heaven by performing virtuous acts. So there is a sign of doing some positive action instead of withdrawal. Ironically, Arjuna has already rejected such pleasures in this world or in Heaven for the sake of ‘sreyas’, the spiritual glory. There is an important insight in this.”

“What Aiya?”

“Sri Bhagavad-Gita is taught to Arjuna, the one who clearly does not wish to

rule this world or lord over the heavens, but only the spiritual quest for freedom. Therefore Krishna's teaching must be indubitably understood as only for spiritual progression and eternal liberation. Any mention of heavenly enjoyments or such material pleasures in the Gita, is therefore only of limited incidental importance, as the goal being total freedom, total perfection and release from Samsārā. Whoever approaches Sri Bhagavad-Gita for learning must keep these lofty goals in mind. That is the reason, Gita is not a book to be merely kept in a prayer room for worshipping with the view to gain material pleasures but a life-instruction manual to be read and re-read to reorient our life”

“I understand Aiya. You said by ‘Sāṅkhyā Yoga’, both duty and knowledge are implied; of these two, which is paramount for liberation?”

“Only the right knowledge aids in our freedom. But without performing one’s duties, one cannot achieve the right knowledge. I suggest we hold this question for a later contemplation. Plenty of chances exist.”

“Yes Aiya. I was initially thinking that the term Sāṅkhyā refers to a particular school of thought in India.”

“No! Of course, there is a separate philosophy known as ‘Sāṅkhyā’ advocated by sage Kapila. But we are not talking about that here. The word ‘Snkhyā’ also means ‘knowledge by enumeration’. Sage Kapila, by discriminating and enumerating the components of all creations, offers greater insights for understanding the nature. His Snkhyā philosophy is one of the pillars of knowledge in ***Sanātana-Dharma***. But please remember, we are not concerned about it here. In the title Sāṅkhyā-Yoga, the term ‘Sāṅkhyā’ simply refers to ‘absolute knowledge’.”

sañjaya uvāca

ēvamuktvā hr̥ṣikēśam guḍākēśah parantapa
na yōtsya iti gōvindamuktvā tūṣṇīm babbhūva ha (2.9)

“*Sanjaya said:*

Having spoken thus to Hrishikesa, Gudakesa, the tormenter of foes, said to Govinda, ‘I will not fight,’ and verily remained silent. (2.9)“

“Aiya, Now Arjuna has openly declared his intention for not fighting!”

"This time he is saying thus not because of his conviction but confusion. Also after submitting himself as a disciple to Krishna, Arjuna has no right to any action until he is told what to do."

Aiya was thoughtful for a while and laughingly said.

"Since Arjuna takes the ground that he will not fight, we will see many a times how Krishna is going to counter with direct-order to fight. Since Arjuna is in a confused state of mind, such an authoritative instruction is needed for him. For our progress, we take the inference: 'to fight' is 'to perform'. So 'the duty first' is going to be the mantra. I say this because, you may be shocked to hear later Lord telling Arjuna: 'do as you wish'. Also at the end, Lord will declare 'Abandon all duties'. All these, which appear to be contradicting, will make good sense, but only if we consistently follow and gradually understand our orders."

I was listening as Aiya continued.

"Notice how silent Arjuna is now. It is because the noise of his deluded intellect and grieving heart are now subsided. He may still be unclear of the way forward, but he has no more agitation. Now that he has surrendered, the responsibility of his care is the onus of the Guru."

§ The Grace of Lord



tamuva^ca hr̥ṣīkēśaḥ prahasanniva bhārata
sēnayōrubhayōrmadhyē viṣidantamidam vacaḥ (2.10)

"Sanjaya said:

To him who was grieving in the midst of the two armies, o descendant of Bharata (Dhritarashtra), Hrishikesa with a semblance of smiling, spoke these words : (2.10)"

Aiya said softly. "Sanjaya after narrating the transformation of Arjuna from a deluded-individual to a matured-disciple, as if setting the scene for 'Gita-Upadesam', tells Dhritarashtra, about the poignant smile of Lord Krishna and his posture of being the Universal Teacher, Jagadguru. Now begins the Gita-Upadesam, the teaching the Lord."

I sat erect with keen intent on hearing.

"Notice the enchanting smile on the Lord's face. It says volume. To a grieving student, the smile of the comforting Guru is blessing in disguise. We will listen to the Lord. In stead of giving an apodictic reply to Arjuna's questions, Lord will

address the root cause of Samsārā which is called ‘*avidya*’, ‘the ignorance of the Self’. Only if you know who you really are, your liberation is possible. That is where the Lord is going to start and bombard Arjuna with the thundering revelation of truth.”

Aiya and I were sitting with our eyes closed. Like Arjuna, we were eagerly awaiting for the Lord’s words.

§ Inquiry of the Self

Aiya said, “Shri Bhagavad-Gita starts now, as Bhagavān is speaking as the Guru’.

Earnestly, we were listening to the words of the Lord.

śrībhagavānuvāca

aśōcyānanvaśōcastvam prajñāvādāṁśca bhāṣasē
gatāśūnagatāśūṁśca nānuśōcanti paṇḍitāḥ (2.II)

“Bhagavān said:

You speak wise words yet for those who deserve no grief you grieve! For those who gave up their life (dead) and those who are yet to give up their life (alive), the learned do not mourn (2.II)

“Grieve not is the message with which Bhagavān starts the Gita” Aiya said, “You will also see at the end, the Lord concludes with the same message - Grieve Not! This is the essence and also the ultimate benefit of Bhagavad-Gita. We will be

free from **shōka** forever and there is absolutely nothing for us to worry about.”

“Aiya, is not Arjuna worrying about death? I can understand if one does not mourn for the death of someone evil, but can one not grieve for the loved ones?”

“Bhagavān says clearly, if you are wise then you will not mourn for any death, no matter who they are. Wise persons do not grieve for the dead; they also do not grieve or fear for the inevitable death of all who are living. You must take note, Bhagavān refers as the ‘dead’ to those who gave up breathing and the ‘living’ to those who still breath, meaning they would also give up eventually”

“Why does Bhagavān keep quoting some ‘wise person’ Aiya?”

“Well, it is only because Arjuna has been talking like a wise-person, giving a long sermon on virtues and sins and a discourse on righteousness, yet he is grieving for the death of those to whom he is emotionally attached to. Arjuna may be talking like a wise-man, but he is really not! His seemingly wise-words were only a cover-up to his weak and confused mind.”

“Who is the wise person?”

“Wise person that Bhagavān refers here is the one who knows about one’s true-self, a person who has attained the ‘Ātma-jnānam’. Only a person who has the realization of one’s true-nature is wise; to such person, there is no more grief”

“That means, if one does not attain Ātma-jnānam, then there is no escape from grief?”

“Yes, that is the insight Bhagavān gives. Freedom from **shōka** is possible only with **Ātma-jnānam**. Therefore the cause of **Samsārā** is the ignorance of one’s true Self. This is known as ‘Ātma-anjnānam’ or simply ‘ājnānam’. So if you want liberation from Samsārā, your anjnānam must be replaced with Ātma-jnānam. This liberating knowledge is what Bhagavān gives and that is why Shri Bhagavad-Gita is deemed as the ‘**mokshā-sāstrā**’. Now we are going to hear this supreme knowledge from Bhagavān. It is the essence of Veda.”

“Aiya, I do not understand what Ātma-jnānam or the self-realization actually means, yet I am intrigued and keen to gain such knowledge. But my concern is, to Arjuna who had asked a direct question, and also disposed himself to the mercy of Bhagavān completely, why does the Lord speak some esoteric philoso-

phy instead of giving a straight answer or command?”

“It is because Krishna is the supreme teacher whose interest is to grant only the liberating knowledge so that the student is totally free. If Bhagavān gives a solution to Arjuna’s current problem, of course Arjuna would be thankful and move on, but soon he would return for yet another problem and so on. If the student has to come back alike, where then is the freedom! Great teachers don’t make the students depend on them. Teaching someone to earn for life is always far superior than feeding for an instance of hunger! That is why Bhagavān has momentarily left Arjuna’s question aside; instead Bhagavān’s intent is to dismantle all possible excuses for grieving. The permanent cure for sorrow is only possible with Ātma-jnānam and that’s why it is the foremost teaching in the Bhagavad-Gita.”

“Will Bhagavān also show the way to *Ātma-jnānam*? ”

“Yes, the entire discourse of Bhagavad-Gita is about this only. Bhagavad-Gita starts with this core knowledge and now the Lord is going to impart in a few sentences.”

“In a few sentences! How could anyone understand? I am absolutely ignorant of all these, Aiya.”

“So is Arjuna, be assured”, comforted Aiya.

“A compassionate teacher, besides teaching what is to be taught, also gives the means of internalizing what has been taught. Bhagavān, the greatest of all teachers, will impart to Arjuna, and thus to all of us, the truth of Ātma. The Ātma-jnānam is given here and now, only to be followed with greater elucidations for our better understanding; there are prescriptions of actions for us to follow, right from what to eat to how to speak, many aspects of our life is to be changed; with the words of wisdom, Bhagavān will trigger a positive transformation in all for us to be eternally free, to enjoy all aspects of our life, here and hereinafter. Therefore we must be really focused, taking all that is being said now; perhaps most of what we are about to hear may be challenging to our grasp, but with trust, we will eventually gain the hold of truth and the means to freedom.”

“Ok Aiya”

“Truth is simple, but very difficult to digest when given, only because our inher-

ent and the nurtured ignorance since birth. Later when Bhagavān talks about practical changes to our life-styles and the needs for personal transformation, we may understand and relate more easily than now; but only if we have the strength of absorption and the *shraddā* to accept what is being said now, about *Ātma*, we truly effect the needed positive transformation within us.”

My mind was calm and kept wide open to receive.

“Let me give you some background on this, in order for you to cope with the thunderous revelation of truth with which Bhagavān starts. Like a researcher, who holds a theory and goes about proving or disproving by experimental research, the student of Vedanta also must take the assertion of Veda on the nature of Self, and perform the search within, of course, by taking due considerations of evidences from own experiences. Only by the self-effort one can attain the self-realization. The grace of Guru and the words of scriptures do offer the required steer towards this self-effort, equipping with the right knowledge and the means, but it is the personal pursuit that ultimately matters.”

“Such pursuit of Self-realization is therefore rely on logical and rigorous experimental evidences?” my scientific temper asked.

“Yes and you will also learn about the short-comings of logic and the inadequacy of the so called ‘scientific objectivity’, but those are for another discussion; right now let us briefly understand what Vedanta says about the Self.”

“Yes Aiya”

“The context is grief and so let us start with the inquiry on grief; what makes one feel sad or remorseful?”

“Many things Aiya, it is the situations that make one either sad or happy.”

“Perhaps; Most of us find grief only due to the situations we face. So we easily blame the situation, and also try to do everything possible to alter the situation, don’t we?”

“Yes Aiya, should we not do that?”

“Ability to realize what is within one’s realm of effort and influence and what is beyond one’s control is a great strength that one can ask for. We all should seek

and develop such foresight in life. Where one's righteous efforts could make a positive difference to the situation, then one should surely act. But where the situation or the outcome cannot be controlled, one should, instead of struggling to change those external situations, prepare within oneself to face the situation. Acceptance is the required way forward and not resistance! Resisting the inevitable only worsens our anxiety and inflates grief."

Aiya continued.

"You must also realize that a situation which may be sorrowful to one, is joyful to someone else. So, joy or sorrow is not in the situation itself, but in the way we handle."

"Yes Aiya, some situations are too difficult to handle."

"Let us consider an inevitable situation that definitely causes the utmost grief and fear; what would that be?"

"Perhaps death? Death does make one sad."

"But death is happening every moment, somewhere for someone. Do you grieve for all those? No, those may simply pass as a news-item and many a times you may not even care. If so, how could you generalise the pain of death?"

"No Aiya, the grief is only when there is death for someone we are attached to"

"That is why we must recognize grief as not due to any situation, but only in one's attachments."

"Yes Aiya, like Arjuna, to whom attachment is the cause of grief."

"This we already saw. Attachment gives the sense of ownership: my people, my house etc. and this is only due to the self-identification, the 'I'. Therefore to resolve grief, we need to resolve attachments which in turn mandates, the resolution of the 'I'. Do you follow?"

I have not found a reason to dwell in such thoughts before, so I was simply listening.

Aiya continued, "In other words, to resolve my *Samsārā*, I must know who I am"

“Aiya, Is it a trick question? I know great seers and sages pose the same question. To me, I am this person, sitting in front of you.”

“Yes, we all identify with our body. That is necessary and also seems obvious. Tell me, when one is deemed as dead?”

“When one is gone Aiya, gone forever from this world?”

“But the dead person’s body goes no where, except starting to decay and disappear eventually. That would mean, the gross-body cannot be the ‘I’. The gross-body is something that the ‘I’ makes use of in this world, is it not?”

“Sounds logical Aiya. The gross-body is mine as long as I live, but it is not the ‘I.’”

“When a person is dead, it does not carry the name of the person; it is an object somehow now discarded.”

“Aiya, it is because the dead body is inert; it has no sentience”

“So you cannot be the body, as there is something else which gives sentience to your existence”.

“Yes Aiya. It must be my mind which perceives all and provide the intellect.”

“If so, the mind is also like your gross-body, a belonging to you, and not you, is not?”

“Why Aiya, is it because that I say, ‘my mind’? But sometimes I think I am the mind”

“In deep-sleep, your senses and mind are not functioning, are you dead then?”

“No Aiya, I am still breathing. My mind may be in a restful state like my body; may be my mind is also sleeping too. But I am alive, because I am breathing”

“So, death is when the breathing is totally gone forever, shall we say?”

“Surely Aiya, at least that is how we declare someone is dead.”

“So when breathing is gone forever, the gross-body, a possession of mine, decays.

What happens to my mind, the other possession of mine?"

"I don't know Aiya. Does the mind also decay and vanish? If so, what happens to me?"

"Good question, let us say, like gross-body, the mind is also gone. When you have, thus lost all your possessions, are you also gone?"

"No, I am just without possessions."

After replying thus, I was dumb-bounded on what I have said. What is that state where I have no possession, nothing external and nothing internal. I gave no idea, but somehow I have come to an assertion that I can exist without any possession. If the possessions are gone, am I also gone? It does not sound logical, yet I asked.

"Aiya, perhaps when all possessions are gone I am gone too. Like if all the part of a table are removed, there is no table."

"The comparison is inappropriate. Table is inert, it never had a self-identity and therefore deforming the table has nothing to offer the 'self-identification' problem."

"So are you saying, the 'problem' is only where there is knowledge?", I stressed the word 'problem'.

"Well, it is a 'blessing' than a 'problem'; you could also refine; it is not an acquired 'knowledge' but the intrinsic 'awareness'. Being aware of existence - in other words the 'consciousness'. That is the differentiation; The consciousness is the beacon of light giving sentience to body and mind, and the rise to self-identity".

After few moments, I said:

"Aiya, I cannot deduce any knowledge in this way to understand who I am. Why then, we say when someone is dead, one's Soul is departed? If that is true, then I think I am the soul, although I do not know what is the meaning of soul?"

Aiya laughed.

“Let us say there is a Soul and it goes somewhere after you are dead. Then at least can you agree, while living, your identification with the body and mind as your true Self is inaccurate.”

“Probably Aiya, but it is necessary. I cannot introduce my Soul to others, I don’t even know where the Soul is. That is why one needs to identify with something tangible.”

“Absolutely. We need to have a tangible identification of ourselves with the body and mind. These days, even that is not enough: race, religion, address, passport, social security number and so many forms of identity that one needs. We use whatever necessary for the Self-Identification to transact in the world, but we do those without the true-awareness of the Self.”

“Yes Aiya”

“Vedanta therefore declares that Self, for which we shall use the term ‘**Ātma**’ hereinafter, is mistakenly combined with other non-Self, the ‘**Anātma**’, do you understand?”

“Sort of! You are saying I am a mixture of Ātma and Anātma.”

“Yes, if you want to see it as a riddle: **Jiva** is Ātma combined with Anātma. Jiva is every life form and in this equation of self-identity, the term ‘Jiva’ represents your notion of Self, the false-identity.”

“Aiya, now we have doubled the problem. Before we only have to find what Ātma is and now we have to enumerate all those that are not Ātma. It would be tedious, is it not? What is the point of this exercise in the removal of sorrow?”

“If we understand true identity as Ātma, then we will not be bothered about the troubles that the Anātma may go through. By the identification of Self with the Anātma, we unduly suffer for the consequences on Anātma. Bhagavān is suggesting to Arjuna, the importance of this shift in perspective, moving from the fallacious identity of Self as Jiva mixed with Anātma to the true identity of Ātma.”

“That means one must know, and then discard all Anātma from the self-identity. Is it not difficult?”

“May be. But Vedanta has considered all such problems and devised a number of simple tests to identify and discard everything that is Anātma.”

“Like what Aiya?”

“Anything that is inert in you is not you. Therefore it must be Anātma.”

“Aiya, are you therefore restating the self-identity equation: Jiva as ‘sentience’ combined with ‘insentience’, is it right?”

“Yes, Vedanta also approaches Self-Inquiry by considering Jiva as a mix of ‘*cetana*’ the ‘consciousness-principle’ and ‘*acetana*’, the inert principle. So, yes, you can have this second equation of self-identity to help in your inquiry. Simply discard all inert things as Anātma.”

“There is also one more”, Aiya continued.

“This comes by the application of the second equation on the first. The consciousness is the power of all sentience and the real ‘seer’ of all that is ‘seen’. No inert instrument can perceive without the underlying power of sentience. Therefore, the self-identify equation can also be seen as combining the ‘Seer’ with the ‘Seen’. In Sanskrit, the ‘seer’ is referred to as ‘*drg*’, the perceiver and ‘the perceived’ as ‘*drśya*’. So if a thing is inert, then it is Anātma; anything that can be perceived is also Anātma; in other words, all objects of perception are Anātma.”

“Aiya, that would mean, I can safely discard all the objects of the world as Anātma, right?”

“Yes, indeed the ‘world of objects’ is Anātma. So for the realization of the Self, we need not inquire about the world, at least for now, as our false identification is with our own embodiments.”

“Yes, my body is inert and perceivable, it is Anātma, right?”

“Yes, Vedanta further elaborates the body into three types in order to resolve subtler doubts that may come. Our physical body, made up of flesh and bones, is known as ‘*sthula-sarira*’ or ‘gross-body’. It is made up of food only and upon death, it decays into earth and other natural elements, thus becoming part of the food-chain again. All gross elements in the world always undergo such changes, from formation to growth to decay.”

“What is the other body Aiya?”

“The ‘subtle-body’ which is not physical, and therefore, is not perceivable. Its centre is the ‘mind’, pervading into the peripherals of other subtle organs of perceptions and actions. The subtle-body generates and transmits subtle energies to animate the gross-body. All gross organs of actions and perceptions are able to function only by these subtle energies, which are collectively known as ‘*indriyā*'; together with the mind, the subtle-body is known as the ‘*sukshma sarirā*’. It is the second body and it is also Anātma.”

“Aiya, if the mind gives sentience to the gross-body, then how is the mind Anātma?”

“Like any polished surface reflects light, the mind because of its subtle nature, is able to reflect the effulgence of Ātma, the real source of sentience. Only that borrowed effulgence makes the subtle-body radiant, which in turns animates the gross-body. In the deep-sleep, mind loses its sentience and therefore the subtle-body also remains in its natural inertness like the gross-body, at least until awaken from the deep-sleep. So the subtle-body is also Anātma.”

Aiya quickly added.

“As you are aware of the state of your mind, like you may say ‘my mind is sad or my mind is confused’ etc., mind is also an object of perception and thus Anātma.”

“What is the third body Aiya?”

“Well, Vedanta indicates the existence of the third body as the subtlest body, and therefore imperceptible. The reasons why a Jiva takes birth and therefore an association with particular gross and subtle bodies is attributed to a ‘body of reasons’ and accordingly called as ‘*kārana-sarirā*’ or the ‘causal-body’. It exists as the cause for the associating the Jiva with the subtle and gross bodies.”

“What is it made of? What does the causal-body do?”

“It is the binding-agent that makes us to come into a life-form, Jiva. This it does by two things: Firstly, it stores the imprint of all our ‘intense-desires’ and also the results due from all actions borne out of such ‘intense-desires’. These deep imprints are called ‘*vāsanā*’ or ‘fragrance’. They remain until expended through

the embodied-experiences by the Jiva. Only to expend the *vāsanā*, Jiva takes different births and thus remains entrapped in a vicious cycle of *Samsāra*. You may consider those imprints of *vāsanā* as the authors of the DNA.”

“Aiya, is it some sort of repository?”

“Yes, the causal-body is the deep-memory filled with all our virtues and sins. Your gross-body and subtle-body are the result of what you have accumulated in your causal-body.”

“Since when does this repository exist?”

“No one can tell. It is ‘*anādi*’, meaning, beginning-less, like ‘ignorance’. Our ignorance about a thing may come to an end when relevant knowledge about the thing is available; yet one cannot say since when one had that ignorance. The causal-body is the thickest of ignorance, the ignorance of not knowing the Self. It is therefore beginning less. But be assured, as it is ignorance, it can be ended with the right knowledge. The causal-body is also a ‘burden of embodiment’ and so to be discarded as *Anātma*.”

“Aiya - the physical body is visible and one could also deduce the existence of a subtle-body as it animates. But how do I know the existence of the causal-body?”

“One cannot perceive the causal-body but its existence can be deduced. The causal-body is the one that binds the whole embodiment into a being. It binds with the rope of ‘*prāna-shakti*’, as the life-energy propelled by the breathing. This is what makes the body to be ‘alive’ or ‘dead’. The *prāna-shakti* magically enters, pervades and leaves the body, at the will of the *Ātma*. When the gross-body is decayed, and not conducive to support the expenditure of stored ‘*vāsanā*’ in this world, then, the *prāna-shakti* starts to unbundle so that the subtle-body is gradually absolved into the causal-body and with the withdrawal of ‘*prāna-shakti*’, the gross-body is discarded; the causal and subtle-bodies migrate to another suitable embodiment, somewhere in the universe.”

“Aiya, is the causal-body also insentient?”

“Yes, it is mere inertia, like a sack with all its potency stored; it is the blanket of ignorance. The state-of deep-sleep can be taken as the Jiva being only with the causal-body. We blissfully experience the causal-body in our deep-sleep, by remaining totally ignorant.”

“Then what makes the re-connection to the subtle-body in the dream-state and with both subtle-body and gross-body in the awakened-state?”

“All such sentient activities are only possible in the presence of the Ātma. Only in the presence of Ātma, whose power in the form of *prāna-shakti* nourishes the embodiments and sustains till the tenure of each instance of birth. So, all three-bodies are Anātma”.

“So after death, the subtle-body propelled by the causal-body goes somewhere to a new life. If so, do we call this as the Soul?”

“Some say the ‘soul’ is gone. Some say, the ‘*prānan*’ has gone. Some say, for example in Tamil, as ‘*uyir*’ has gone. You may call it anything. There is a technical term for this in Vedanta and we do not need to discuss this at present. We will have plenty of opportunity to resolve this too with Bhagavān’s teaching.”

“Ok Aiya. If we discard our embodiment as Anātma, where is the Ātma?”

“We will discover. Right now, the context is grief due to the fear of death. So we need to understand what does death mean to ‘Ātma’?”

“What does death mean to Ātma, Aiya?”, I simply repeated.

“Bhagavān will describe the nature of Ātma and this knowledge will dispel our ignorance and reveal the immortality of Ātma”

“Aiya, blessed indeed to listen. But is not Arjuna’s problem more of a moral dilemma? Or perhaps a question on his duties and obligation? Why then Bhagavān starts with the philosophical understanding of the Self ?”

“All moral, ethical and societal obligations are discharged freely, without any fear of execution only when one is a true spirit - knowing one’s own nature. You will see how different our world-view will be, once we understand the true nature of ourselves. Also, Bhagavān is very much context-sensitive. Arjuna’s grief is on the inevitable death of his beloved Bhishma and Drona. To overcome such grief and fear of death, one must know one’s true nature”.

“But Bhagavān did not say anything about the true nature. He simply said, wise people don’t worry about being dead or alive. It still does not make sense to me”

“You have to understand by the term ‘wise people’, Bhagavān refers to those who have self-realization. The wise have learnt to shift their identification from the ‘Anātma’ the ‘Ātma’. This is the insight.”

“That means...”

“That means, If Arjuna slays the bodies of Bhishma and Drona in the war, only their Anātma are destroyed. The Ātma is never touched. Bhagavān is asking Arjuna to shift the focus of identity from the false notion of Jiva (the mix of Ātma and Anātma) to Ātma alone. When such shift takes place, at once, there is freedom, as the Self is totally free and immune form all changes to Anātma. This supreme understanding and the approach to life is the way to be free from grief.”

“Aiya, sounds intriguing. But even the slaying of Anātma and therefore the loss of Jiva is tragic and unbearable. In that case what should one do?”

“Well, it is a great question. Not everyone is able to immediately grasp and identify with the Ātma. In that case, one should go by one’s ethical and moral obligation, defined by one’s role in life. After imparting the supreme knowledge of the Self, Bhagavān will also instruct Arjuna to consider this moral stand, befitting his role as a King and act accordingly. If that does not work, one should also consider one’s one stature, in the society as the result of action and inaction and thus decide the way forward in the challenging times. Every cultured and aspiring human-being must consider any or all of the above perspectives in life.”

Aiya paused for a while.

“I have to say all these things so that we may better understand what we are going to hear. Let us listen to Bhagavān who describes the nature of Self to remove this false fear.”

We refocused on the scene of Kurukshetra.

§ Knowledge of the Self

na tvēvāham jātu nāsam na tvam nēmē janādhipāḥ
na caiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarvē vayamataḥ param (2.12)

“Bhagavān said:

“Never did I not exist, nor thou, nor these rulers of men ; and no one of us will ever hereafter cease to exist (2.12).”

Aiya said, “Bhagavān uses double-negative to reinforce the point that He existed before and He will continue to exist in the future. That is also true for everyone because all of us existed before and will continue to exist in the future”, Aiya said.

“That means, there is no death to us?”, I asked.

“Yes, That is the import. But Bhagavān is talking about the Ātma, the true Self, and not the embodied Jiva. One does not doubt one’s own existence in the present. The fear is only about future. That is why Bhagavān refers to the past and the future to confirm the eternal nature of the Self. Before birth into this body, as Ātma, all of us existed in the past; we will continue to exist in the future, after death - so we all always exist.”

Aiya again emphasised. “Self, the Ātma is eternal ‘**nitya**’. That is the insight. So death does no harm to Ātma.”

“Aiya, does it mean the Anātma is not eternal?”

“Yes, Anātma - anything that is not Ātma - is therefore ephemeral.”

“How is Ātma eternal?”

“Let us hear how Bhagavān clarifies.”

dēhinō’sminyathā dēhē kaumāram yauvanaṁ jarā
tathā dēhāntaraprāptirdhīrastatra na muhyati (2.13)

"Just as in this body, the embodied Jiva passes into childhood and youth and old age, so does the Jiva pass into another body after death. The wise-person is not distressed by these changes (2.13)."

"Our body being Anātma undergoes all sorts of changes and Jiva as the embodied personality, also identifies with those changes by the false notion of the Self. When the body is discarded at death, Jiva takes another body that too undergoes changes. So while the Anātma undergoes such continuous changes, the Ātma remains changeless. The nature of Ātma as '*nirvihāri*' or 'changeless' means, Ātma is eternal existence. As Ātma is free of all changes, it is completely independent, '*svantantra*'. This is what we must understand."

"Aiya, It is quite assuring to know the immortality of the Self. But please consider the plight of Arjuna, more so, the situations of ordinary people like me when faced with the death of loved ones. Even though their Ātma remain eternal, the fear of losing their embodied identity is real; in the sense, death is tragic and grieving is inevitable."

"Commonly grieving for death is understandable. But here we are talking about how to overcome such grief and be ultimately free from such cycle of sorrow. Therefore it is essential to develop the true understanding of things. If the nature of Anātma is realized as one of constant change, then one should accept the inevitable changes as those come; Resistance does not help."

"Aiya, how could one develop such a sense of dispassion?"

"Only by knowing the true nature of the Self in contrast to the temporal nature of everything else. That is the mark of the wise-people. Let us hear what Bhagavān says".

*mātrāsparsāstu kaunteya śitōṣṇasukhaduhkhadāḥ
āgamāpāyino'nityāstāṁstitikṣasva bhārata (2.14)*

"The sense-contacts it is, O son of Kunti, which causes the pleasure and pain; (like) heat and cold, these come and go; these are impermanent and so endure bravely, o descendant of Bharata (2.14)"

"Aiya, is Bhagavān talking about Anātma?"

"Yes. Bhagavān points out the temporal nature of Anātma. Like heat and cold

that come and go in nature, joy and sorrow come in life. It is only because that the sense-organs engage with the sensory-objects, such heat and cold, joy and sorrow are experienced. Such impacts are temporal. No joy lasts forever; no pain lasts forever; what is joyful at one occasion may be rueful at some other occasion. Warmth is needed in cold winter and cool breeze is sought in hot summer. As the changes, their impacts are also temporal; therefore simply accept what may come and endure. Bhagavān is asking us to accept all experiences with equanimity. Endurance with the clear knowledge that all will pass is the true power to freedom”

“Aiya, I do not know how could one develop such equanimity. But what is the benefit of such approach?”

“This the Lord gives.”

yam hi na vyathayantyētē puruṣam puruṣarśabha
samaduhkhasukham dhīram sō'mṛtatvāya kalpatē (2.15)

“O the greatest among men (Arjuna), the wise-person, to whom, verily, these (changing nature of pain and pleasure) have no impact, to whom pleasure and pain are same, he is fit for immortality (2.15)”

“The key quality that Bhagavān indicates is ‘**titiksha**’ , forbearance, the power of endurance. It is not a meek submission to sorrows in life but facing it equally like happiness on the knowledge of the temporal nature of things and the externality of the Self. The wise-person endures everything with equipoise and he is not affected by both pain and pleasure. As a result, he becomes the fit person to attain liberation from **Samsāra** and thus immortality.”

“Aiya, how is accepting the positive and negative impacts of changes equally leads to liberation?”

“Only by the realization that Ātma alone is the true nature of the Self, one is able to discard any identification with Anātma. Then there is no sorrow from any change to the Anātma”.

“Aiya, even though changes are only to the Anātma, how can one be unconcerned? As embodied Jiva we have to deal with the realities of life; so how could such forbearance be practiced?”

“You talk of ‘realities of life’. Do you know what is ‘real’ and what is ‘unreal’? Perhaps this is what Bhagavān is also leading to. Let us first to listen to Him.”

nāsatō vidyatē bhāvō nābhāvō vidyatē sataḥ
ubhayorapi dṛṣṭo’ntastvanayōstattvadarśibhiḥ (2.16)

“The ‘unreal’ has no existence. The ‘Real’ never ceases to exist. Wise-person with the knowledge of the Truth fully know both these (2.16).”

“Aiya, I don’t understand these statements! Nonexistence has no existence - this is obvious. Real is what exists. Is this not a common sense? What does Bhagavān mean by this? Why such knowledge makes a person wise?”

“Well, one must deeply contemplate on what Bhagavān says here about what is real and what is unreal. Do you know?”

“Aiya, are you asking me what is ‘real’ and what is ‘unreal’?”

“Yes”

“Well, to state simply, if something can never be experienced or perceived by our senses, then it is ‘unreal’ or ‘nonexistence’. Like the ‘horn of a hare’ - which is unreal. I would say, if we can experience a thing, then it must be real.”

“So experience is the decider of what is real?”

“I guess so.”

“Is dream real?”

“Perhaps at the time of dreaming... the dream is real to the dreamer, otherwise it is not real.”

“Therefore experience cannot be the good discriminator about the reality of things, right?”

“Then what is the option?”

“Vedanta uses specific terms to resolve this. Let us use the same Sanskrit terms. I can’t think of equivalent words in English or other languages. What is ‘real’ is

denoted by the term ‘**sat**’ or ‘**satyam**’. It refers to ‘existence’. The opposite of ‘sat’ is ‘**asat**’, which is unreal and nonexistence.”

“How are these discriminated Aiya?”

“Vedanta declares that which exists *independently* at all three periods of time, meaning the past, the present and the future is ‘**sat**’; everything else is ‘**asat**’, unreal.”

“Aiya, that is brutal. If we take such definition, all things in the world become unreal or ‘**asat**’ ; there is no guarantee that a thing will exist forever as all things in the world come and go. Is not existence an instantiation of a thing in time and space?”

“Such view presupposes that there is no existence beyond the ‘time and space’. The Self transcends time and space. We will learn more about this in due course. But to resolve your doubt, let us understand what is meant when Vedanta says ‘*independent existence*’. Consider a hot cup of water. Do you agree that in the hot-water, there is existence of hotness.”

“Yes Aiya, that is why it is called hot-water!”

“Is hotness the nature of water?”

“No, it has become hot because of the fire that heated the water”

“So hotness in hot-water is only a ‘borrowed existence’ and soon this borrowed existence would be lost, is it not?”

“Yes”

“Hotness is always in the Fire as its ‘inherent nature of existence’, is it not? But in the hot-water, hotness is only an ‘incidental nature of existence’ as it is temporal. Likewise, the nature of existence in the Anātma is also incidental as it is borrowed from the Ātma. Yet we mistake it as the real existence in Anātma. Existence of Anātma is dependant on Ātma, where Ātma is independent.”

“What happens if Anātma loses its incidental existence?”

“It gains another incidental existence. That is why all objects change; the loss

and gain of incidental existence is cyclic. The real existence is for the underlying Ātma only.”

“That means ‘all things in the world’ are unreal, *asat*? ”

“Yes, Not just the ‘things of the world’, the ‘world of things’ is also ‘*asat*’. This assertion of Vedanta may be hard for us to accept, as we vividly perceive and experience the world of things. Only to resolve this difficulty, Vedanta introduces a term for the temporal existence of things - which are incidental only in the present.”

“What is the term Aiya?”

“It is *mityā*. It refers to all things that exist only in the current period (the present) and that too, relying on the existence of something else. Therefore the world we see is *mityā* and its incidental existence is based on the Ātma, the consciousness; only Ātma is *satyam*.”

“If I use the given definition of what is ‘*sat*’ and what is ‘*mityā*’, perhaps I can understand why the world is *mityā*; but it is impossible to reject the world as ‘unreal’ or ‘*asat*’. To me, the world exists very much for my perception and experience.”

“We all have the same difficulty. Even a few schools of Vedic thoughts also start with such assertion only. But our non acceptance does not nullify the assertion of Vedanta. Let us therefore consider the term *mityā* to mean a ‘relative’ or ‘temporal reality’. Then it may be easier to understand that all forms of existence in the world are *mityā*. Only for the non inquiring mind, the world and therefore the Anātma appear to be real. So be it. But in the true identification of the Self, we have to deal with the discrimination of ‘*sat*’ from all forms of ‘*asat*’. Self is Ātma alone, totally free from Anātma, which is *mityā*. The import of scripture ‘*aham satyam, jagat mityā*’, Self alone is absolutely real and the word is only apparently real as given by Bhagavān.”

“Aiya, how is Ātma, *satyam*? ”

avināśi tu tadviddhī yēna sarvamidaṁ tatam
vināśamavyayasyāsyā na kaścitkartumarhati (2.17)

“Know ‘That’ to be indestructible, by whom all this is pervaded. None

can cause the destruction of That, the Imperishable. (2.17)"

"Bhagavān indicates the immortality of Ātma. It is indestructible. Since Arjuna is worried about the imminent destruction of Bhisma and Drona, Bhagavān is reminding him that dis-embodiment of Bhisma and Drona, or anyone for that matter, does not amount to the destruction of the Ātma."

After a moment of two, Aiya continued.

"Having already told about the eternal nature of Ātma, why again Bhagavān talks about it? It is only to differentiate the eternal nature of Ātma' from the seemingly eternal nature of Anātma. Samsārā is seen as eternal cycle of birth and death; but this seemingly never ending cycle of Anātma is a chain of changes; but the eternal nature of Ātma is one that is without any change."

"I don't understand Aiya"

"See the river as an ever flowing stream of water. In its constant flow, one can never step into the same water, as the stream is constantly changing. The constant flow of changes in Anātma is also similar in nature; the cycle may look eternally going, but it is full of creation, decay and destructions. But the eternal nature of Ātma is one without any change."

"Why Ātma is indestructible?"

"This we must understand. A thing gets destroyed if its parts get destroyed. As Ātma is formless, Ātma has no parts and therefore, there is no scope for decay. Since Ātma is formless, it has no boundaries and so is all pervasive. Bhagavān has already shown Ātma as eternal, meaning existence in all three period of time. Therefore Ātma transcends both time and space boundaries, hence imperceptible. What is therefore shown is that Ātma is '**sarvagata**', all-pervasive".

"Aiya, if Ātma is timeless, how is it that we talk of its existence in the 'now'?"

"It is great question to contemplate. Firstly, know that there is no absolute time. Therefore when we say 'eternity', we only refer to a 'timeless existence'; this is what is inferred by the term 'sat'. So, the 'now' can only be a symbol of that eternity, immeasurable but always present. The 'now' is never an unit of time; only the ceaseless consciousness is the proof of its existence."

“This is quite intense Aiya, I pray for my mind to expand and absorb this well”

“We all shall persevere to learn. But don’t try to learn only by discriminating intellect; also apply integrating devotion. To give step wise understanding, Vedanta always uses a few very simple examples. The ‘mud-pot’, ‘pearl-in-shell’, ‘snake-in-rope’ and such are quite insightful and elegant examples; we shall use these repeatedly. To illustrate the indestructibility of Ātma that gives incidental existence to Anātma, consider the example of ‘mud-pot’. All mud-pots are permeated with the same stuff but when the mud-pots are destroyed, all their forms and names merge back into the same stuff, the mud. Destruction here is only for the form but not for the underlying material. In a limited way, like mud lending an incidental existence to pots yet remaining indestructible, the all pervading Ātma lends temporal existence to all objects in the world, yet remaining indestructible.”

“Aiya, As Self is Ātma, there must be infinite number of Ātma as there are infinite number of life-forms. Is that not right?”

“As Ātma is all pervasive, it also means, Ātma is indivisible. So Ātma is non-dual, ‘**advaidam**’. Only there are infinite ‘Jiva’ that hold the false identity. The immutable Consciousness in the individual is the same as the all pervading Consciousness in the universe. Vedanta uses the term ‘Ātma’ when referring to the immutable Consciousness in the individual and the term ‘**Brahmam**’ for the all pervading Universal Consciousness. There is no difference, which we shall see.”

“What does the term **Paramātma** then mean?”

“When Ātma is identified by with the embodiment it is called ‘JivĀtma’. Contrast to this, if we consider the universe of all names and forms as the embodiment of all-pervading Universal Consciousness, then it is called the ‘**Paramātma**’. It is like applying some limiting adjuncts to adore the Brahman in some cosmic form and divine name. Such divine embodiment is ‘**Ishvara**’ the controller of all creations. The important lesson is while all embodiments have temporal existence and therefore destructible, Ātma is eternal and imperishable. Therefore one should not worry about what is inherently perishable - the Anātma.”

antavanta imē dēhā nityasyōktāḥ śarīriṇāḥ
anāśinō’pramēyasya tasmādyudhyasva bhārata (2.18)

“The material body of the indestructible, immeasurable and eternal liv-

ing entity is sure to come to an end; therefore, fight, O descendant of Bharata (2.18)"

Aiya continued.

"Bhagavān is coming to conclude on the inquiry of Ātma and Anātma. Having already told about the eternal nature of Ātma, here he reinforces the same by citing the contrasting with the persistently perishable nature of the Anātma. Like the flow of river that constantly changes is Anātma. Its seeming eternity is one that is full of constant death and birth. But Ātma is changeless and eternal. It is referred to as '**kūṭastha-nitya**', the timeless-changeless eternity. Here Bhagavān also offers another attribute to Ātma by the term '**apremeya**'. It is also quite potent with deeper insights."

"What does it mean Aiya?"

"The term 'apremeya' means 'immeasurable'. As Ātma is all pervasive and therefore boundless surpassing the space and time dimensions, it is immeasurable. In contrast, Anātma, with names and forms, is subject to measurements. The term 'apremeya' also means 'transcendent', referring to that which is beyond all experiences or knowledge. This means, one can never experience the Ātma. This also gives you another way to discriminate Ātma from the Anātma. If a thing can be experienced or 'objectified', then it must be Anātma. Know that Ātma is not '**indriya-vishaya**', any objectified matter."

"Aiya, if I cannot experience my Ātma, then what does self-realization amount to?"

"First of all you cannot say 'my Ātma'. It is not a belonging to you, it is you! You cannot experience you. Take a simple example. Can you see your eye?"

"I can Aiya, in a mirror"

"You can only see a mirror image of your eye in the mirror, but never see the eye that sees the mirrored-eye"

I was listening.

"Seer is never seen. That is why Ātma, is not subjected to any knowledge. Self-realization is just a phrase to indicate a state where one is one with one's true

nature.”

“Aiya, If Ātma is indescribable and beyond all words, then what are the scriptures trying to do? Is not Bhagavān through His words also trying to show the Ātma?”

Aiya laughed.

“The scriptures and also Bhagavān are showing not the Ātma but giving the true knowledge *about* the Ātma. When the scriptures declare ‘Ātma is eternal’ or ‘Ātma is the witness-consciousness’ etc., only the knowledge about Ātma is given and not the Ātma. This is because, Ātma is realizable only through self pursuit.”

“Then what is the purpose of spiritual teaching?”

“Upon indicating the true nature of Ātma, the Scriptures and Bhagavān in the Bhagavad-Gita, give us the means to cleanse our minds and apply our discriminative intellect to systematically identify what is not Ātma; by doing so, one is able to rid of all associations with Anātma, and in the end, remain in one’s true essential nature, the Ātma. That self-realization is the only essential process for the end of the pursuit to perfection. This is the supreme goal of Vedas and true import of Bhagavad-Gita and the teaching of all great teachers thereafter.”

“Very well Aiya; if Ātma is beyond all experiences, then who is the enjoyer and experience in us?”

“This is also a very important question and only to drive the discourse in this way, Bhagavān has used the phrase ‘aprameya’. Know that ‘**anubhav**’ or ‘experience’ can happen only in the ‘now’. You cannot have experience in the past or in the future?”

“My past experiences....”, I was hesitant to complete my sentence.

“Experiences occurs in the mind and only at the present time. You can recollect experiences from the past but such recollection is only a thought; of course, by such recollection if you rejoice or regret in the present, that is a different experience. The important point is, experience can only happen in the ‘now’, Jiva is who experiences and thought is the format of experience. All experiences are possible only because of Ātma, the awareness, the only sentience-principle.”

"Aiya, I cannot understand. How can the mind, which we saw as inert, perform action and experience things? That requires some sort of sentience, and so the Ātma must be a party to this."

Laughingly Aiya said, "No, the Sun is shining and in the presence of Sun, all things flourish. We may say that the Sun is giving the life-energy to all, but do you really see the Sun performing actions! No, the Sun merely exists and in its glorious presence all things naturally happen. Sun is neither a doer nor an enjoyer. So is the Ātma, powered by its effulgence, in its presence, the mind gains sentience and perform actions and experience the impacts. The problem is, the mind, because of ignorance, does not cognize its true nature of insentience, instead thinks that it has its own identity as the I. That false identification is what Bhagavān is trying to resolve in us. Listen to the Lord."

ya ēnam vētti hantāram yaścainaṁ manyatē hatam
ubhau tau na vijānītō nāyam hanti na hanyatē (2.19)

"He who looks on the Self to be the slayer and he who looks on the Self as the slain - neither of them apprehends (the true nature of Self) correctly. The Self neither slays nor is slain (2.19)"

"What do we take from this Aiya?"

"What is enjoyed or experienced by you is always based on what is due to you, based on what is done by you. In other words, actions lead to experience and experience is a matter of mind. Since Ātma is not a doer of any action, *akartā*, there is nothing due to enjoy; so Ātma is *abhoktā*."

"Aiya, by action do we only refer to physical actions?"

"No, action refers to all intent, words and physical acts. So words, thoughts and deeds together amount to action. This means, not only the physical performer of an action is the doer, even the person who initiates or promotes action through words and thoughts is the doer. The term '*karta*' generally refers to the 'doer', as well as '*kārayati*' one who induces some one to do an action. Both are subjected to the result of such action. Here Bhagavān says that ātma is both *akartā* and *akārayati* - without involving in any action and therefore in any indulging of the outcome of actions."

"Here Arjuna has to understand the action - 'the killing' in the war - and the ex-

perience - ‘being killed’ therefore do not belong to Ātma, the true self. If Arjuna is able to shift his identification with the Ātma, then there will be no conflict in the due performance required by his embodiment in the war - which is to fight. The slaying of enemies do not amount to destroying the true nature of the Self.”

“Aiya, Is Bhagavān indirectly referring to the ‘wise-person’ again?”

“Yes, wise-person, who has attained the self-realization, does not consider that the Ātma kills or that the Ātma can be killed.”

“Aiya, how is Ātma immutable?”

“To indicate the immutable nature of Ātma, Bhagavān contrasts with the inevitable changes to Anātma.”

na jāyatē mriyatē vā kadācin nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na
bhūyah
ajō nityah śāśvatō’yaṁ purāṇō na hanyatē hanyamānē śarīrē
(2.20)

“For the Ātma, there is neither birth nor death at any time. He (Ātma) has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He (Ātma) is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval; and not slain when the body is slain (2.20)”

“Bhagavān says as the Ātma is immortal, it does not have birth. Therefore it does not have the six types of changes, ‘**shadvikara**’ that the Anātma has to pass through”

“What are these changes Aiya?”

“We can witness these changes in our embodiments. First there is **asti** or subsistence, the essential elements of the body in rudimentary form, then it is **jāyatē** born; then it **vardhatē** grows; then it **vipariṇamatē** matures in growth; then **apakṣiyatē** it starts to decay to end in **vinaśyatīt** death, only to return to **asti** or the rudimentary form to reborn. But the indwelling Ātma does not suffer from any such change. This is the understanding.”

vēdāvināśinām nityam ya ēnamajamavyayam
katham sa puruṣah pārtha kam ghātayati hanti kam (2.21)

“Whosoever knows Him as indestructible, eternal, unborn and inexhaustible,-How, o son of Pritha, and whom does such a man cause to slay, and whom does he slay? (2.21)”

“Now Bhagavān concludes to Arjuna: Once a person realizes the true nature of Ātma as imperishable, eternal, unborn and immutable, then there is no way that a person can be a slayer or an instrument of slaying. Therefore such a realized person is free from all actions and all results”.

“Aiya, then if Bhagavān asks Arjuna to fight and kill the enemies, don’t we not see a contradiction?”

“Not if you understand that the action of Arjuna does not destroy the true nature of the so called enemies. Not if you understand that the action of Arjuna is done without any attachment as the Ātma is free of all actions and the outcome. Don’t worry if this is not clear yet. Once Bhagavān instructs on how we should perform our day-to-day action to be free of their outcome, these doubts will vanish.”

“Ok Aiya, but when the body is slain and death occurs, what happens to the JivĀtma?”

“This we learn from what Bhagavān indicates next.”

*vāsāṁsi jīrṇāni yathā vihāya navāni gṛhṇāti narō’parāṇi
tathā śarīrāṇi vihāya jīrṇā. nyanyāni samyāti navāni dēhī (2.22)*

“Just as a man casts off his worn-out clothes and puts on new ones, so also the embodied Self casts off Its worn out bodies and enters that are new. (2.22)

“You asked about what happens to the person when dies? Here is the answer from God. The term ‘**dehi**’ means one who owns ‘**deha**’ the body. So whatever that has assumed the ownership of body - which we call the ‘**Jiva**’ - the I-personality, is now shedding the body. Like a person who removes the worn-out garment and wears a new one, the Jiva discards the worn-out body and acquires a new body. The insight is: the dress may change but the person remains the same. Similarly, upon death, Jiva takes a new body but remains the same”

“Worn-out body means, the body which is decayed due to old age?”

“No, here it does not mean only the biologically weakened gross-body. It refers to the weakened capacity of the embodiment to further endure the experiences of the results of past actions that are stored in the causal-body. Do you recall the discussions we had about the three types of bodies?”

“Yes Aiya, I still do not understand what this Jiva is? Is it the Soul? As anything different from Ātma is insentient, how does this Jiva gains the sentience to go from one body to another?”

“This is quite subtle to understand. Let us briefly explore. The subtle-body, **sthula-sarira**, which we can simply refer as the mind is inert but reflective. Subtler an object is more reflective is its capacity. Air being subtle, it has the quality to reflect sound as the echo. So is the mind. It is like a polished mirror and when it gains the radiance of the Ātma, by its effulgence, the mind becomes sentient. Like a piece of glass reflecting the light of Sun, the mind reflects the effulgence of Ātma, thus animating other subtle and gross embodiments. Like the computer when powered-up gains the capacity to perform, the power of sentience to the Mind comes from Ātma. But the irony is, having gained the sentience, the mind forks into thinking faculty, memory, intellectual faculty and personality. These are respectively noted by the terms ‘**manas**’, ‘**chittam**’, ‘**buddi**’ and ‘**ahankāram**’. The ‘ahankaram’ or the ‘I-personality’ is the one who projects as the ‘Self.’”

“So Aiya, then the Jiva is just the reflection of the true Self?”

“Well, the Ātma is also known as ‘**cit**’ - the supreme awareness. When the Mind reflects the ‘cit’, the animated mind behaves as if it is the ‘awareness’. In Sanskrit, the word ‘**ābhāsa**’ means, ‘pretending’. Since the mind is now pretending like the ‘cit’, it is called ‘**citābhāsa**’, the ‘pretending Self’. This is ‘Jiva’ that has the borrowed sentience and therefore has ‘incidental existence’. The ‘Jiva’ therefore takes the embodiment according to what is due to Jiva.”

“What do you mean, what is due to Jiva?”

“Well, Jiva takes ownership of desires and out of desires performs actions. The result of those actions are to be experienced by the Jiva. If you are the **karta** - doer, then you must be the **bhokta** - the enjoyer of the results. This law is inevitable and we will learn more about this when Bhagavān teaches”

“So what if Jiva does nice things, those that are virtuous only?”

“Then the Jiva gets nice things. Nice embodiment, nice world and nice experiences.”

“Is that not good?”

“Of course it is good, if only one could always do virtuous things. But do remember as long as there is action owned by Jiva, there is the need for the Jiva to take one body after another, like changing one shirt after another”

“What is the escape?”

“That is what the secret of Bhagavad-Gita. Drop the false notion of I. Be one with Ātma.”

“Or don’t do any action...” I said, worrying that I may not be able to realize the Self.

“Well, no one can remain without doing any action even for a moment. So that route is closed.”

“Then?”

“We can perform actions and also become free from any impact of those actions. Logically that should help, is it not?”

“Yes Aiya, will Bhagavān teach that technique too?”

“Yes, that is the best route for all of us to start. But before we go there, we must be fully grounded on the true nature of Ātma. That is why Bhagavān says how we should look at death and its zero-impact on Ātma.”

nainaṁ chindanti ṣastrāṇi nainaṁ dahati pāvakaḥ
na cainaṁ klēdayantyāpō na śoṣayati mārutaḥ (2.23)

acchēdyō'yamadāhyō'yamaklēdyō'soṣya ēva ca
nityaḥ sarvagataḥ sthāṇuracalō'yam sanātanaḥ (2.24)

“The Self can never be cut to pieces by any weapon, nor burned by fire, nor moistened by water, nor withered by the wind. (2.23)

The Self cannot be cut, nor burnt, nor wetted, nor dried up. He is everlasting, all-pervading stable, firm, and eternal (2.24)."

Aiya said, "Destruction of Anātma is caused by any force of nature – the air, fire, water and earth. This is what he has reinforced by repeating the same twice. The body is subjected to all sorts of ailments. The weapons made up of earthly materials can kill. Water can kill; air can take the moisture away from the body. But none of these powers of nature can touch the Ātma."

"Aiya, Powerful indeed these words and comforting, especially when one witnesses death that otherwise shatter one's confidence"

"Yes, The Ātma is untouched. Bhagavān thus concludes Ātma is eternal as it is timeless; Ātma is immovable as it is all pervasive and Ātma is ever-fresh or '*sanātana*'. The so called 'Hinduism' is actually known as '*sanātana-dharma*' only for the reason that its goal is to impart the truth about Ātma, the ever-fresh eternity."

"Aiya, I am sorry to ask this. How does Bhagavān know all? Is it because, He is the incarnation?"

"Well, at least you seem to acknowledge Bhagavān as God! Arjuna was not aware till late that Krishna is an incarnation. Many during the times of Krishna did not see Krishna as God. Only the blessed few, like Kunti and Draupati could do. Anyway, to answer your doubt, let us listen to the Lord."

avyaktō'yamacintyō'yamavikāryō'yamucyatē
tasmādēvam viditvainam nānuśōcitumarhasi (2.25)

"It is said that Ātma is invisible (nor perceptible by indriyā), inconceivable (not thinkable by mind) and immutable (not objectifiable by intellect). Therefore, by realizing thus, you should have no cause for worry (2.25)"

"Did you notice? Bhagavān says whatever he is quoting is already said in the Scriptures. He is now quoting from the Upanishad, the most revealing part of the Veda also known as Vedanta. Thus, Bhagavān gives prominence to the Scriptures as the gospel of truth. Does it clear your doubt?"

"Yes Aiya, Sorry I asked that way...", I said with some guilt.

“That is fine. Bhagavān has now concluded to Arjuna, having realized the eternal nature of Ātma, he should not be unduly worried about the bodies. In other words, he should not be worried about the outcome of his righteous actions.”

“Aiya, is Bhagavān saying the same thing again?”

“Yes, now Bhagavān is summarizing what all he has been said about Ātma. He gives succinctly that Ātma is invisible and therefore not perceptible by our senses, Ātma is inconceivable and therefore not thinkable by the mind; it is not knowable, therefore beyond our intellect. By reasserting the true nature of the Self, Bhagavān is asking Arjuna where is the cause of worry on account of Anātma which is only ephemeral”.

“Aiya, what if Arjuna does not consider Ātma to be eternal?”

“Well, even then there should be no cause to worry. Listen to Bhagavān”.

atha cainaṁ nityajātaṁ nityaṁ vā manyasē mṛtam
tathāpi tvam mahābāhō naivam śocitumarhasi (2.26)

jātasya hi dhruvō mṛtyurdhruvam janma mṛtasya ca
tasmādaparihārye'rthē na tvam śocitumarhasi (2.27)

“Perhaps, if you think that Ātma is forever subject to birth and death, again and again, even then, O mighty-armed (Arjuna), you have no cause for grief (2.26);

“Whatever is born is certain to die; whatever is dead, is certain to take birth again. Therefore, you have no cause for grief, on account of such unavoidable certainty (2.27).”

“Aiya, is Bhagavān therefore asking us to accept death?”

“We must accept what is naturally inevitable. We must have the ‘forbearance’ to accept all inevitable consequences. Resistance to what is certain causes grief. So accept what is unavoidable. Resistance is ignorance; that alone is Samsārā..”

“Aiya, birth of a child bring happiness to the parents; similarly its death will give grief. Is that not natural?”

“Yes, but it is the nature of ignorance. The nature of knowledge is to free. We are therefore aiming to learn how to overcome ignorance and be free. Let us learn what death is and what birth is.”

avyaktādīni bhūtāni vyaktamadhyāni bhārata
avyaktanidhanānyēva tatra kā paridēvanā (2.28)

“All created beings remain as ‘unmanifest’ in their beginning, ‘manifest’ in their interim state and ‘unmanifest’ again when annihilated. So what need is there for grief? (2.28)”

“What is implied Aiya?”

“Ātma has no birth or death. So we are only talking about birth and death as change of state of Anātma. Bhagavān simplifies by stating that Anātma is forever in one of the two states: the unmanifested state or ‘**avyaktam**’ and the manifested state or ‘**vyaktam**’. When something is perceptible, then it is said to be manifested in some form, otherwise, it is in unmanifested state. The change from unmanifested state to manifested state is ‘birth’ and manifested to unmanifested state is ‘death’ for Anātma. Our gross-body from its manifested state dissipates into the gross-elements of nature upon death; then from such rudimentary form, the body manifests again upon birth.”

“Is that why Bhagavān compares death to the discarding of worn-out dress and birth to the wearing of a new dress?”

“Yes, such simple examples are the most striking. Body is like the dress that requires maintenance and eventual replacement. Jiva carries on with life and every death is an interlude to the next birth of the journey. As one would hide in a room while waiting to change into a new dress, the Jiva remains in an unmanifest state upon death and upon rebirth, manifests with a new body. So there is no need to grieve for giving up the body.”

“Aiya, who decides on the new body for the Jiva?”

“Jiva decides! Ironically Jiva does not realize this. The type of body and the nature of manifestation for every birth are driven by the ‘**vāsana**’, which are the ‘deep desires and results of past-actions’ accumulated in the store-house of ‘causal-body’ of the Jiva. Therefore we get what we deserve in order to carry on

the embodied life, for the experience of accumulated ‘*karma*’ till those exhaustion. So, we decide what we will be and we take ownership for all our sufferings and joy.”

“Not God?”

“Bhagavān has not talked about God so far. So let us focus only on taking our due responsibilities rightfully. Surely, we will meet God when we are ready.”

“Very well Aiya. The discussion about Ātma is truly fascinating; even though I have not fully understood the concept yet it is quite intriguing”

“Ātma is not a ‘concept’, it is ‘the truth’. All along, Bhagavān has taught that Ātma is eternal, changeless, independent, all-pervading, unattached, imperceptible, inconceivable, immutable, uninvolved, and so unaffected, remaining as the eternal witness, and giving sentience to all. It is amazing.”

§ Glory of the Self

āścaryavatpaśyati kaścidēna.
māścaryavadvadati tathaiva cānyah
āścaryavaccainamanyah śṛṇōti
śrutvāpyēnam vēda na caiva kaścit (2.29)

“Some view the Ātma as amazing, some describe Ātma as amazing and some hear the Ātma as amazing, while others, even after hearing about Ātma, cannot understand at all (2.29)”

“Bhagavān thus, quoting from the Katopanishad, speaks the glory of Ātma as the most obvious yet the most mysterious knowledge and as the most wonderful and rare.”

“Yes Aiya, Ātma is amazing; the knowledge about Ātma is intensely engaging but intricate to comprehend.”

“As we hear all these words about Ātma as if those are descriptions for some distant power, then we have lost the plot. Ātma refers to the true-self. So I am the Ātma. You are the Ātma. From what we have learnt from Bhagavān, you should declare, ‘I am eternal, I am free, I am unaffected, I am immortal’ etc.”

“Aiya, I am so humbled and fearful to make such declarations. I have been thinking of myself as a sinner, a meek personality. How could I just shift my identity with Ātma, the supreme?”

“There is no other way except to take these words of wisdom with at most trust, *shraddā*, and with the help of what Bhagavān teaches, progress to realize the true nature of the Self. First of all, we must be immensely grateful for being able to even gain the access to such words of wisdom. No other knowledge, no other scripture, no other teaching elevates every life-form to the supreme state of existence. When we are told, ‘You are the total perfection, you are the absolute freedom, you are eternal’, those words should not be discarded merely as the highest form of flattery – even then it creates a positive effect, but taken as the glorious trigger to propel our self-inquiry to discriminate the true Self from the false notion of mixing with Anātma. That is why Bhagavān says the knowledge about Ātma is amazing.”

“Please explain Aiya?”

“Bhagavān uses the term ‘*āścharyam*’ which could mean amazement, rare, unique etc. We consider anything uncommon as rare and anything intricate as subtle and whatever enthrals immeasurably as wonderful. Bhagavān implies all these inferences in the three contexts: the *Ātma-jnānam* or Self knowledge and the *Ātma-jnāni*; secondly, the teaching of Ātma-jnānam and the teacher; and the learning of Ātma-jnānam and the learners; All these are rare and wonderful.”

“Why Ātma-jnānam or Self-knowledge is amazing and rare?”

“As Ātma-jnānam is about ‘knowing the knower’, it is uncommon. It leads to knowing that the knower is not knowable thus it is intricate and the most subtle. As a result of Ātma-jnānam, nothing new is attained except the realization of the true Self leading to boundless fulfilment; so it is unique and wonderful”

“Aiya, Is it rare to find *Ātma-jnāni*, the one who have attained the self-realization?”

“Yes, It is because, only a small number of people ever evolve with the quest for perfection and venture to seek the true-self. Among those who seek, only a small number will persevere with right effort and even a smaller number become the self-realized. So it is rare to find the *Ātma-jnāni*”

“Why is imparting Ātma-jnānam amazing?”

“It is because only a very few are capable of imparting such wisdom and only a very few are truly seeking for such wisdom. Also Ātma is invisible and inconceivable, teaching of Ātma-jnānam has to start with the teaching of what is not Ātma. This would mean negating everything that we have been cherishing so long as real; thrashing such long-held ignorance for the sake of imparting the truth is the most intricate and rare form of teaching. So it is amazing.”

“Why are the teachers of Ātma-jnānam hard to find?”

“Only the Seers of the Self, who have already attained the Self-Realization, are fit to impart Ātma-jnānam to others who come to them with the earnest desire and essential qualifications. As told before, it is only a few who attains self-realization; amongst them only a fewer elects to impart to others. So, it is rare.”

“What makes the learning of Ātma-jnānam an amazing experience?”

“Ātma-jnānam is the subtlest of all knowledge and it turns the learner’s attention inward. It is the pursuit of self discovery. Although one thinks of oneself to be near and fully known, the process of self-discovery reveals how far away one’s false personality is from one’s true identity. That is why Ātma-jnānam is truly amazing. Ātma-jnānam is not about any ‘object of knowledge’ and so leads not to any new attainment, but to the very being of awareness of all knowledge. So it is immensely wonderful and exhilarating learning.”

“Why is the seeker of Ātma-jnānam is considered rare?”

“We all are very busy with our life that revolves around what happens outside. Only a very few people gains the turning point to realize the entrapment of Samsārā, the cycle of joy and grief. Even a fewer will seek to exit this entrapment; only a lesser number of them will understand that there is definite freedom. To go after such freedom and take necessary effort and persevere, even lesser number of people will brave. The moments of greatest impacts in one’s life, like that of Arjuna in the battlefield, must be actively converted to a turning-point to the pursuit of truth; that occurring is also very rare.”

“Why Aiya?”

“That is because of one’s own desires and actions. Only when these are cleansed, the path to perfection opens.”

Aiya continued.

“Bhagavān concludes the real wonder is, how many people even after hearing the words on Ātma many a times do not understand anything and so miss out on the opportunity for self-realization.”

I thought of my own inability. “Aiya, why don’t I comprehend?”

“Ātma is somehow viewed as something remote and therefore a distant goal. Especially when the supreme nature of Ātma is heard, we keep Ātma as something powerful and glorious to be attained from somewhere. Even many sincere seekers imagine Ātma to be visioned in some mysterious form and therefore seek some sort of experience which is out of the world. In meditation, they constantly look for some light or special sound and some even hear voices etc. All these are

not Ātma but only the creations of the mind.”

“Aiya, then what about the divine meditations, contemplating on the images of God and meditating upon the divine names of God? Many say that they have visions of God that they have been contemplating upon.”

“We will discuss these when Bhagavān offers knowledge on God and such specific form of contemplation called ‘upāsana’. There is a time for this. Whatever form that we vision is only what the mind sees. Remember, all forms are temporal in nature and therefore ‘mityā’.”

“Even the forms of God?”

“Everything and anything... If something can be objectified - seen, known, experienced etc., then it is Anātma only. That is why even the learners of Ātma-jnānam may miss out and digress by seeking something external. All mystical and awe-inspiring forms are only in the nature as Anātma. Ātma is not the seen, but the seer. One needs only the finest of reorientation in one’s own identification to realize yet it is mostly missed. That is why Ātma-jnānam is glorified as *paramarahasyam* or the supreme secret.”

“Why it is a secret Aiya?”

“Even though Ātma-jnānam is revealed in the scriptures and imparted by the teachers and now available to access in all sorts of media for anyone to study, not everyone understands it. That is why it is the most open secret and supreme because of the revelation of supreme truth.”

“What are the efforts that one should take to seek Ātma-jnānam Aiya?”

“The foremost effort required is to hold on to that quest for freedom; when there is the spark of fire seeking the liberation, it must be tenderly nourished. Of course, then it is all about cleansing our mind and sharpening our intellect as these are the instruments to discriminate the Self away from the Anātma and be one with the Self. To remain in the state of self-realization requires effort”

“How do we do?”

“Identification with Ātma and remaining forever in such Ātma-jnānam is called ‘*nishtā*’ or ‘Ātma-jnana-nishta’. That is the state of the self-realized.”

“Can we identify such great sages?”

“Bhagavān will show us by narrating the marks of such great personalities. In those rare blissful moment of existence, every one of us is truly one with one self. The difficulty is to remain in such true state of awareness. It is because of our vacillating mind and unsteady intellect, we drop down, clinging back to the false identity with Anātma .”

“What is the remedy?”

“For being one with ‘Ātma’ at all times, that is to be in the ‘nishtā’, one should take up continuous penance called ‘*nidityāsanam*’, the pursuit of self-realization. This is the process by which one removes all the doubts and inhibitions about the knowledge gained from the teacher about the Self. But it must be preceded by learning under the able and willing teacher.”

Aiya continued.

“In Vedanta, the method of learning is termed as ‘*sravanam*’; it literally means ‘hearing’, implying that the learning of Ātma-jnānam should be necessarily under the personal teacher and not by one’s own effort of reading. During the learning under the teacher, the received knowledge may not always conform to the one’s own belief and experiences. This is where the commitment and perseverance of the seeker come to rescue. With ‘shradā’, the seeker will absorb all that is heard and then quietly engage in contemplation, known as ‘*mananam*’, for slowly and surely resolving all resistance, replacing with confidence in what has been imparted by the teacher based on Vedas. This ‘sravanam-mananam’, the hearing and contemplation cycle must continue forever in order to sustain the *nidityāsanam*, the application of the learning for the reward of Self-realization – the Ātma. This process of Ātma-jnānam is called ‘*jñāna-yoga*’ or ‘*sāṅkhya-yoga*’. This is what Bhagavān is revealing.”

“Aiya, it is comforting that my lack of complete understanding of what Bhagavān has said so far is not an impediment for seeking further learning.”

“You are not alone in this. Arjuna is also in the same situation. As a keen seeker, he will ask all the right questions, thanks to the compassionate teacher, Bhagavān will mercifully steer towards the right path. That is why Bhagavān now reinforces Arjuna that he should nor worry at all (and do what he needs to do).”

dēhī nityamavadhyō'yaṁ dēhē sarvasya bhārata
tasmātsarvāṇī bhūtāni na tvam̄ śocitumarhasi (2.30)

“O descendant of Bharata, he (the Ātma) who dwells in the body can never be slain (even though the bodies are slain). Therefore you have no cause for grief for any being (2.30)”

“Aiya, I have a niggling doubt. Just because Anātma is perishable, can one venture to destroy it? The temporary and perishable nature of a thing does not give any one the right to destroy its existence, unduly? Arjuna therefore can still say that the knowledge of Ātma and the Anātma is not a sufficient trigger to engage in the war.”

“Good question, and glad that you have also used the words like ‘right’, ‘unduly’ etc. These words can also taken to imply one’s rights and duties that one must respect in this world. Only by understanding what these words mean to each one of us, we could progress by our actions or inactions.”

“How Aiya?”

“Self-realization is truly an affair of Jiva; it is a personal journey for liberation and fulfilment. It does not mean, the Jiva upon attaining the self-realization, could violate the ‘rights and duties’ in this world. We have already seen the world as ‘mityā’, a ‘present reality’; although temporal in nature, it is where the embodied existence of Jiva transacts with the infinite manifestations of bodies of names and forms. In all manifestations, there is a natural ‘order’ of things and ‘flow’ of changes to ensure a supreme order of cohesion in the world; the ‘flow’ of changes in nature is called ‘**ritm**’, like the word ‘rhythm’ in English and the ‘supreme order of cohesion’ is called ‘**dharma**’, although it has also various other meanings; in subscription to this supreme order of cohesion, dharma, every embodied Jiva must also exercise the certain ‘duties’, which is indicated by the derivative word ‘**svadharma**’. Therefore ‘dharma’ is the first principle for the Jiva, giving the framework for our conduct in the world. Only when one adheres to ‘dharma’, and lives by one’s ‘svadharma’, one is qualified to the pursuit of Ātmajnānam. That is why the entire Veda focuses only on these two profound principles: ‘dharma’ and ‘jnāna’. Know this.”

“Aiya that means, even if one attains self-realization and is being one with Ātma, there is no freedom from the duties. Is it so?”

“Duties are to be performed. But how the duties are discharged differentiate the wise-person from others. The modus-operandi of the Seers and the Seekers, we shall learn as Bhagavān teaches”

Aiya continued after a pause.

“For anyone who goes about leading a righteous life, there comes occasions when the intellect is deluded about the right course of actions. Arjuna has such a conflict: whether to fight which is a duty of him as a King or to withdraw from action which he thinks his right. Now that Bhagavān has imparted Ātma-jnānam, it is time that the essence of dharma also to be reminded to Arjuna so that at least on the basis of dharma, Arjuna could be persuaded to do the right thing.”

“Aiya, I found the discourse on Ātma-jnānam is very interesting and challenging; Is the knowledge of dharma also difficult to follow?”

“No, It is not difficult to follow. Relatively larger part of Veda deals with dharma as it is about the conduct of worldly life. So also in the Bhagavad-Gita, we will hear more on dharma. Only by learning what is right and doing course-corrections to our way of life, we can be successful in our life – both for the material and spiritual goals. Righteous living aligned to ones ‘svadharma’ is the most essential and simpler way to be directed to Ātma-jnānam. Let us take a pause to contemplate on what we have heard so far under Ātma-vicāra or self-inquiry and be prepared to continue the witnessing of the glorious conversation at the Kurksehtra.”

Aiya remained with his eyes half-closed.

I was quietly sitting with mindful of zeal and an inexplicable wonder.

§ Dharma - Righteous Order

Aiya said, “Bhagavān imparted the discrimination of Ātma and Anātma and in this knowledge, when realized, one attains the true freedom, free from all fears and grief, liberating from Samsārā. This is the goal or the ‘*lakshya*’ for all human-beings even though it was imparted in the context of war to Arjuna who was deluded and full of grief. By knowing the immortality of the Self, with the knowledge that Ātma is neither the killer and nor the killed, Arjuna should not be grieving anymore.”

“Aiya, Ātma may be immortal but Anātma, the identification with which we transact in the world does matter! Just because Anātma is perishable, one does not need to be unconcerned about the killing of Anātma. Also, killing may be deemed as sin and so Arjuna’s reluctance to fight may be justified.”

“Perhaps Arjuna may also be thinking alike, and that is why, Bhagavān now addresses the same issue in the context of ‘*dharma*’ or ‘righteousness’. Also Ātma-jnānam is not quite easily attained as one needs the right mental and intellectual capabilities. That is also the reason, having imparted Ātma-jnānam, Bhagavān now moves to talk about the means of attaining such qualities through the importance of performing one’s righteous duties. Even otherwise, doing what is right and also doing in the right way empowers us to progress. Let us listen to Bhagavān.”

svadharmamapi cāvēkṣya na vikampitumarhasi
dharmyāddhi yuddhācchrēyō’nyatkṣatriyasya na vidyatē (2.31)

“Further having regard to your own duty (svadharma), there is no reason for any waver, for there is nothing more meritorious for a Kshatriya than a righteous war. (2.31)”

Aiya said.

“Bhagavān is now answering some of the Arjuna’s earlier questions. Do you recall, earlier (1.31), Arjuna lamented ‘I don’t foresee any good ensuing from the slaughter of my kinsmen’ etc. Now Bhagavān tells him, pointing at his ‘*svadharma*’ as a ‘*Kshatriya*’ that there is nothing more welcome than a righteous war”.

“Aiya, What is ‘svadharma’? Is a Kshatriya always expected to fight and kill others

in wars?"

"Let us understand the wider meaning of the term 'svadharma'. It represents the inherent nature of things; a mango tree bears only mango fruits and that is its 'svadharma' as anything else is deemed unnatural. All species thus fulfil their svadharma by unfolding their innate nature. As human-being our human-nature distinguishes from other species in the world; with our self-identity and the innate capacity to comprehend the nature of things, we are able to refine our 'svadharma' appropriate to our evolution and our roles in the society. 'Svadharma' for human-beings is therefore a combination of inherent, inherited and imposed responsibilities, all according to - who we are, what stage in life we are and what is our role of engagement in the society."

"Aiya, who decides such obligatory duties and values?"

"Ours are inherent in nature and also refined by ourselves. Each of us is laden with some obligations as human-beings. This is further refined by the state of our existence, for example at what stages of our life we are, and what roles we have assumed in the society etc. We have plenty of opportunities to discuss this in due course. Here Bhagavān points out that as a Kshatriya or a warrior class, Arjuna has the svadharma to fight - not for fighting-sake, but only for the protection of dharma"

Aiya continued.

"A person who is Kshatriya takes the vow to protect others and for which prepares to die fighting. For him, therefore to engage in a war, when and where necessary is the 'svadharma'."

"Aiya, in this modern age, how do we define 'svadharma', when we don't have classification of roles such as Kshatriya etc?"

"The obligatory duties always exist. Suppose a Policeman on duty sees a wanted criminal, then is not his onus to confront the criminal! That is his 'svadharma' for upholding the law, justice and righteousness. At all times, 'dharma' applies to all. To understand this, Veda classifies dharma into two, namely, '*sāmānya-dharma*' or 'general righteous conduct or values' and '*visesha-dharma*' or 'special obligations'. These values are applicable to all human-beings and are also specially imposed by the scriptures."

“Aiya, please explain.”

“Do you like anyone to steal your stuff? Do you like anyone to lie to you?”

“No Aiya, that is not preferred.”

“Such ethical and moral values are common to all mankind. There are many such righteous-conducts and moral values that apply to all at all times. We learn about these from our responsible parents, teachers and also by the imposition of laws of society. These are enumerated and explained in the scriptures. Such values are known as ‘sāmānya-dharma’ as those apply to all at all times.”

“Then what are ‘visesha-dharma’?”

“Those are special obligations, a set of values and conducts that are applicable only for certain type of people and only at certain times. Those are situational and take precedence over the ‘sāmānya-dharma’.”

“Example Aiya”

“Like the Policeman who has the ‘visesha-dharma’ to apprehend a culprit could apply necessary violence for doing his duty. That is a privilege only given to the Policeman. You cannot, for example, beat-up a thief by taking law into your own hands. Do you see the difference?”

Aiya continued.

“Visesha-dharma has higher order of precedence over sāmānya-dharma and this rule applies if one sees conflict. For example, ‘**ahimsa**’ or ‘nonviolence’ which is a common-value for all human-beings does not apply to the soldier when he is to discharge the ‘visesha-dharma’ of fighting the enemies of the nation. When we do not understand such rules of ‘dharma’, we are confused on deciding what is right in certain situation. That was what has happened to Arjuna who could not own up to his visesha-dharma of fighting the war.”

“Aiya, such ethical and moral codes can change from time to time and also from place to place. If so, how is a divine order of conduct, prescribed by the ancient scriptures deemed fit for everyone even now?”

“Scriptures provide fundamental values which form the basis of all moral and

ethical codes; these are when instilled under the name of God, those become particular ‘religious’ values. In Vedas, dharma is coded to apply for universal value and based on dharma, the learned can derive and evolve the codes of conduct. As long as these values are in adherence to ‘dharma’, changes are welcome and inevitable. But such interpretations ought to be done by those who adhere to the ethos of ‘dharma’. That is why when we learn ancient texts like Sri Bhagavad-Gita, we are able to understand in the right context. But be assured, the import of Sri Bhagavad-Gita and the universal dharma that it propagates from the ancient scripture stand the test of times as the most suited for universal application.”

After a pause, Aiya said, “Don’t take that being a Kshatriya means merely engaging in every war and indiscriminate killing. No, the true warriors keenly await for the opportunity to be engaged only in ‘just’ wars. Bhagavān is indicating such an opportunity that is in front of Arjuna.”

yadṛcchayā cōpapannam svargadvāramapāvṛtam
sukhinaḥ kṣatriyāḥ pārtha labhantē yuddhamīdrśam (2.32)

“True warriors (Kshatriya) have reason to be happy, O Partha (Arjuna) to have the chance of such a righteous war presenting itself, as a good fortune before them as a doorway to heaven. (2.32)”

“Aiya, is Bhagavān enticing Arjuna to fight?”

“Yes, but by telling him the benefits of performing his righteous duties, irrespective of the outcome. Opportunity to participate in a war, which you should understand for our learning as in preforming our duty is to be deemed as a fortune. When righteous action is duly performed there can be only benefit in any case. Here, if Arjuna wins the war, he gets to rule the earth; if he dies in the war, his sacrifice will translate into ‘**punya**’ or ‘virtuous benefits’, giving him entry into the Heaven.”

“So Arjuna does not need to worry whether he wins or dies in the war?”

“Yes, again recall, Arjuna had earlier (1.37) pondered: ‘How can we, by killing our kinsmen be happy?’ Here Bhagavān points out that a true warrior is always happy when presented with the opportunity of a righteous war, which is considered as the door to the heaven. Winning gives the benefit of ruling the world and

death, the honour of heaven.”

“If one is not interested in the pleasures of heaven...?”, I asked with a tone of scepticism; why bother about something which may or may not happen after death, I thought to myself.

“Well, not doing one’s duty would also mean hell in this world as one would be discredited for the failure. Bhagavān therefore warns Arjuna of the dire consequences of not taking up the war.”

atha cēttvamimam̄ dharmyam̄ saṅgrāmam̄ na kariṣyasi
tataḥ svadharmaṁ kīrtim̄ ca hitvā pāpamavāpsyasi (2.33)

“If, on the other hand, were you not take to this battle which conforms to the requirements of righteousness, then thwarting what is consistent with your own nature (svadharma) and your good repute, you will become involved in sin. (2.33)”

Aiya said, “For not performing what is expected of one’s svadharma, in this world one would be discredited, losing all the good repute that have been accumulated so far. Also not doing what needs to be done, one commits a sin, ‘*pāpā*’, which takes one to the hell upon death. Again, Bhagavān makes this statement as a response to Arjuna’s earlier reference (1.45) of going to the hell on account of engaging in the war and killing others. Bhagavān is systematically closing all the escape routes which Arjuna has been building to evade his duty.”

“Yes Aiya, I remember Arjuna was also worrying earlier that as the result of the war, impiety will take hold of the entire family; but now he learns by not performing his duties, he will be abandoning righteousness.”

I also followed-up with a question. “Aiya, why is there ‘*pāpā*’ or sin for not doing a thing?”

“Well, first let us understand what is ‘*pāpā*’ and ‘*punyā*’. To seeker of liberation from Samsārā, the worst is the disqualification to pursue the path of liberation. Therefore Bhagavān brings to notice those potential impediments which accrue as the result of one’s actions and inactions. For any action, there are some tangible results which are observed and experienced as the ‘outcome’ of the action; but there are also subjective-impacts and effects that may not occur immediately but may impact later in this life or life hereinafter. Such accumulated results due

to be experienced are known as ‘**adhrista-phalam**’ invisible-impacts and also as ‘**karma-phalam**’, the impact of past-actions. If those lead to ‘virtuous benefits’, then those are called ‘punyā’; if those lead to ‘evil effects’, those are called ‘pāpā’. Right now, may you apply ‘**shradda**’ and accept this, as we will learn more on this and have the opportunity to resolve any lingering doubt.”

“Very well Aiya. I thought only action leads to results and outcome, why there is sin because of inaction?”

“That is simply because inaction also leads to results and outcome, don’t you see! Scriptures define what has to be conditionally done as ‘**vihita-karma**’ and what has to be certainly avoided as ‘**nishita-karma**’. If one does what should not be done, or if one does not do what should be done, then on both counts, one commits sin. Error of omission and error of commission are both duly counted towards sin.”

Aiya continued. “Please understand, by talking about **adhrista-phalam**, Bhagavān is not promoting desires for the Heaven or the worldly pleasures to Arjuna. Already Arjuna has rejected the worldly pleasures, the **preyas** and asked for only the spiritual goodness, the **sreyas**. Bhagavān’s words should be thus deemed only as an example of consequences of doing and not doing ones duty.”

“mmm... That is revealing Aiya. Since ‘punyā’ and ‘pāpā’ are generally assumed to be affecting our life after death, should we care about those in current life?”

“We should. Even if the effect of ‘pāpā’ and ‘punyā’ is not a compelling argument to take up the duty, the failure to perform one’s duty is enough to put one at the centre of ridicule in this world. Insult is the greatest pain especially for Kshatriyas. That is why Bhagavān is now pushing on what honourable people keenly seek - ‘**keerti**’, the honour.”

akīrtim cāpi bhūtāni kathayiṣyanti tē'vyayām
sambhāvitasya cākīrtirmaraṇādatiricyatē (2.34)

“People, too, pronounce a never-ending verdict of calumny on you and, to one who has been esteemed, infamy or dishonour is worse than death. (2.34)”

“Honour is the greatest value for Kshatriya. Having come all the way to the place of action, which is the battle-field for Arjuna, if he withdraws at the moment of

action from the action, then it will invite only ridicule and insults.”

“Aiya, won’t others consider Arjuna’s withdrawal as an act out of his nobility and compassion to others?”

“Even if those are the real reasons, how would anyone know those?”

bhayādraṇāduparataṁ māṁsyantē tvāṁ mahārathāḥ
yēśāṁ ca tvaṁ bahumatō bhūtvā yāsyasi lāghavam (2.35)

avācyavādāṁśca bahūnvadiṣyanti tavāhitāḥ
nindantastava sāmarthyam tatō duḥkhatarām nu kim (2.36)

“The great warriors-on-chariots will look down on you as quitting from the battle out of fear; and, having been (hitherto) highly looked up by them, you will incur their contempt. (2.35);

“Those against you will speak of you in unspeakable terms, scorning your ability. What is more painful than that! (2.36)”

“Duryodhana and other-warriors, riding on great cars will certainly make Arjuna’s withdrawal as coming out of his fear, especially for facing the might of Karna and other great warriors. Is not insult a poison to those who seeks honour in life! Therefore Bhagavān forces Arjuna to think and take right action.”

hatō vā prāpsyasi svargam̄ jitvā vā bhōkṣyasē mahīm
tasmāduttiṣṭha kaunteya yuddhāya kṛtaniścayaḥ (2.37)

“Killed, you will reach heaven; victorious, you will enjoy the earth. Therefore , O son of Kunti, arise, having resolved to fight. (2.37)”

“Arjuna earlier (1.37) had lamented how could he, by killing the kinsmen be happy. Bhagavān here confirms that both in victory and death, the true warrior is happy as he attains either the heaven or the glory on earth. Bhagavān thus completes his rationale also on the basis of ethical and moral stand for why Arjuna has to perform his duties, here to fight. By taking up the duty with that righteous approach, Bhagavān says, thereby can be only benefits. We all have to be ever prepared to perform our duty with clear intent and focus. That is the lesson given here.”

After a short pause, Aiya continued.

“The supreme goal is to realize one’s true nature as Ātma. Only an *Ātma-jnāni* is free from all bindings and thus perform actions without any fear of outcome. Thus only such Seer is perfectly happy. Since the quest to desire the true nature of the Self is rare to come, and even if it comes, rarer are those who could pursue, Bhagavān is now starting to impart the ways to progress by performing actions. By performing the righteous actions according to one’s ‘svadharma’, one is able to attain freedom from fear and ultimately move towards Self-realization. That is why, Bhagavān is now moving to a new discourse to impart the knowledge on how one should perform one’s actions to attain freedom. This technique is solely depends on certain shift in our attitude towards action and the outcome and therefore deal with mental and intellectual purity. This is known as ‘*Karma-Yoga*’. By starting with the glory of Karma-Yoga, Bhagavān is injecting greater interest for us to dwell deep in the subsequent discourses for the understanding and the application of Karma-Yoga. May we keenly learn!”.

§ Karma Yoga - Introduction

sukhaduḥkhē samē kṛtvā lābhālābhau jayājayau
tatō yuddhāya yujyasva naivam pāpamavāpsyasi (2.38)

“Then, treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, success and defeat, prepare for the battle (duty), and thus you will avoid sin (2.38)”

“By saying thus, Bhagavān has planted the seed of ‘**Karma-Yoga**’ which is the foremost step for attaining the essential qualification to pursue Self-Realization. ‘Karma-Yoga’ is all about our shift in our attitude in handling the action and its outcome.”

“Please explain Aiya.”

“Victory is always seen as a gain. Every gain gives us joy. On the contrary, defeat is taken as a loss and every loss is painful. Therefore our tendency is to like victory, gain and joy and dislike defeat, loss and grief. But any sensible person should know: in any action, the outcome could lead us to any of these two vectors. So if we perform with such likes and dislikes, we are certainly to be impacted by whatever the outcome. Driven by the fear of defeat, loss or grief, one may therefore even give-up doing what ought to be done. In the same way, the desire for victory, gain and joy may drive one to do even what not to be done. Both are not good. That is why we should develop equanimity. Bhagavān Sankara says treating the pairs of opposites equally means doing the action dispassionately, without any like or dislike on the action and the outcome.”

“Aiya, how could one not like victory? How could one not dislike defeat? Is not motivation born out of our desire to win?”

“These questions are valid and we will learn more about this when we understand Karma-yoga. Bhagavān, while encouraging Arjuna to fight, also advises that he should enter the war keeping himself unaffected by the debilitating mental tendencies like pleasure and pain, gain and loss, conquest and defeat etc. Equanimity in all challenging situations ensures success in life and enables the purging of passionate desires. We are going to learn more about this process.”

ēśā tē'bhihitā sāṅkhyē buddhīryōgē tvimāṁ śṛṇu
buddhyā yuktō yayā pārtha karmabandham̄ prahāsyasi (2.39)

“What has just been taught to you is reason in the context of Ātma-jnānam; but now listen of the same according to Karma-Yoga, doing which you can cast off the bond of action (2.39)”.

“Bhagavān is clearly indicating the start of a new lesson. Having revealed the solution for freedom from Samsārā is Ātma-jnānam, and also having established dharma as the driver for unfailing performance of ones actions, now Bhagavān comes down few steps to speak about how one should live in this world. That is why action is the focus hereafter.”

“Is it about Karma-Yoga?”

“Yes, Interestingly, Bhagavān has used the term ‘**Buddhi-Yoga**’, the atonement of mind for the right attitude to perform action; this is only to imply the essential difference of the ‘shift of perspective’ in the intellect between the pursuit of ‘Ātma-jnānam’ and the attainment of the essential qualifications for ‘Ātma-jnānam’.”

“I don’t understand Aiya.”

“By shifting our perspectives.....For Ātma-jnānam, the shift is to move the self-identification away from the Anātma to Ātma. This we saw. For the qualifications to pursue Ātma-jnānam, which is through Karma-Yoga, the shift is required from the ‘ego-centric’ desireful approach to ‘dispassionate’ attitude to the actions and outcomes. That is why Bhagavān uses the term ‘buddhi-yoga’ to essentially mean ‘Karma-Yoga’, the yogic way of action. He thus indicates Karma-Yoga as the essential step to attain the necessary mental purity and capacity for the pursuit of Ātma-jnānam. So the first step is to perfect our actions.”

“Aiya, is it about all our day-to-day actions?”

“Yes. Action is the essential nature to all. Nothing can be action-less. Action is therefore the determining force of our life experiences - both good and bad. Every action, besides giving an objective-result, also brings certain subjective-impact which the actor has to necessarily endure. This compulsion of subjective-impact, also known as ‘**Karma-phalam**’ exists only because there is desire in the performer. That is why the term ‘Karma’ also indicates that it binds.”

“Then how could we act, yet remain free from such binding”

“By performing karma as ‘Karma-Yoga’ - it is doing action without any expectation.”

“How is it done Aiya?”

“Bhagavān has taught in the Ātma-Anātma discrimination that one needs to shift the focus of Self away from Anātma to Ātma. That shifting is an exercise for our ‘buddhi’ and it is nurtured by the process of ‘*Jnāna-yoga*’. In a similar way, when ‘buddhi’ is used to shift the perspective of the doer from ‘passionate ownership’ of action to a ‘dispassionate performer’, then its amounts to ‘Karma-Yoga’. Therefore, attitude or the ‘*bhāvana*’ is the sole determinant if an action is done as ‘Karma’ or ‘Karma-yoga’. So we can understand by the term ‘buddhi-yoga’ the practice for nurturing our attitude to perform ‘dispassionate actions’. In that sense, it is synonym to ‘Karma-yoga’.”

“Aiya, which yoga I should do?”

Aiya laughed loudly. “Attitude-tuning is what we need to achieve first. It is a mental state but shaped by the intellect. Change in mental attitude can be steadfast in nature only when it is supported by the conviction of intellect. That is why buddhi is what we need to sharpen as it is like a sword that cut asunder the ‘*Karmabandham*’ or bondage of works which is binding.”

“What is karmabandham?”

“It refers to what I have said earlier: the condition that one has to endure the accumulated results of actions or the ‘karma-phalam’. We have to wait for Bhagavān to explain more on Karma-Yoga. Right now, Bhagavān is speaking about the glory of Karma-Yoga so that our interest becomes deep and our keen attention invested.”

nēhābhikramanāśo’sti pratyavāyō na vidyatē
svalpamapyasya dharmasya trāyatē mahatō bhayāt (2.40)

“In this (Karma-Yoga) there is no failure or forfeiture of any merit nor is there involved any demerit by transgression. Even a little of such a way of life saves one from great apprehension. (2.40)”

“By mentioning thee key differences in doing an action as a Karma and as a Karma Yoga, Bhagavān bring the glory of Karma-Yoga.”

“How Aiya?”

“In any action, there is a risk of impact due to failure, is it not?”

“Yes”

“But an action when is done as Karma-Yoga, bears no such risk of impact due to failure.”

I was surprised and asked. “How Aiya?”

“Failure is only our concept of not reaching our expectation. When there is no expectation, then where is an impact of failure! There is deeper insight in this. By removing attachment to action and outcome, there is no expectation and therefore no resistance. So, there is no impact of failure”

I was noting down for my further contemplation on this compelling idea.

“Secondly, in doing an action, there is a risk of accumulating sin. But when the same action is done as Karma-Yoga, there can be no sin”.

“Aiya, even if it is an evil act?”

“No, an evil act is something one should always avoid. It is ‘*nishita-karma*’. That is not referred here. Any normal activity could lead to sin when the motives are sinister. For example, if you are helping someone, which is a noble task, but your motive may be evil. That is what is inferred. Bhagavān mentions about a side effect ‘*pratyavāya*’. This is the fault due to error of omission of one’s obligatory duties. For example, the daily ‘*sandhya-vandhan*’ which is the obligatory duty for some, when it is done, it creates delusion in the mind. Like weeds coming in the fertile soil, weakening emotions arise making one’s mind impure. Therefore the benefit of certain obligatory duties are to be considered from the protection of such side-effects of not doing those.”

“What is the third difference Aiya?”

“When an action is performed as Karma-Yoga, even if the act is not fully com-

pleted according to the prescribed rules, there is some positive benefit for whatever the level of completion is. But when it is done not as Karma-Yoga, then unless it is completed and also in strict adherence to the rules, there may not be benefit at all.”

“How Aiya?”

“You have to consider the various rituals that are prescribed in the scriptures for attaining many benefits in this life and hereinafter. When these rituals are done only with personal desires, then the benefits are not achieved unless and until those are properly done and completed. Incomplete rituals may not yield any benefit and improper execution may also bring adverse effects. But if the same are done as Karma-Yoga, where the motivation is not for any personal gain, then even incomplete execution or errors are not deemed as sin; at least some benefits will be obtained as per the scriptures. That is what is indicated. The emphasis is not on the rituals here, but the motives - to perform without selfish desires.”

“I want to understand how to perform my actions as Karma-Yoga Aiya”

“We shall learn from Bhagavān. Right now, the nature of those who perform Karma-Yoga is to be understood as revealed by Bhagavān.”

vyavasāyātmikā buddhirēkēha kurunandana
bahuśākhā hyanantāśca buddhayō’vyavasāyinām (2.41)

*“Here, o Prize of the Kurus (Arjuna), in this virtuous path (Karma Yoga),
the well-founded reasoning is unitive but the thoughts of the irresolute
are scattered and endless! (2.41)”*

“Bhagavān talks about the glory of Karma-Yogi, the wise-person who performs actions as Karma-Yoga with ‘**vyavasāyātmikā-buddhi**’, meaning ‘steadfast’ focus and ‘unitive’ thinking.”

“Steadfast in what Aiya?”

“Karma-Yogi is clear about what his goal is and what are the means to that goal. Therefore he has steadfast focus only on the goal and only on the actions towards that goal. In contrast, others have endless, and often changing goals and therefore endless means, making them forever wandering unfocused.”

“In what we should set such singular focus?”

“The goal should be for the liberation from Samsārā”

“Very well; then the means should be attaining the Ātma-jnānam, right?”

“Indeed. That should be the singular focus, which the Karma-Yogi keeps in tact. But for others, the worldly objects and goals keep on changing and therefore their mind vacillate and intellect waver.”

“How come the Karma-Yogi is able to establish in such singular goal?”

“According to Bhagavān Sankara, it is only because that the Karma-Yogi abides in Veda and takes scriptures as the only guidance. This means, to steadily apply Karma Yoga, one should adhere to scriptural instructions, as imparted by able teachers, like we get from Bhagavān in Sri Bhagavad-Gita.”

“Aiya, although I try to read and listen to Sri Bhagavad-Gita and other scriptural texts, I am not able to focus and convert my life mission to that single goal of liberation from *Samsārā*. Why is this?”

“Well, this the problem for most of us. But by sheer perseverance one can surely achieve such a mind-set. The reason why our mind becomes scattered and drift away from the single and supreme goal of liberation is also given by Bhagavān.”

yāmimāṁ puśpitāṁ vācam pravadantyavipaścitaḥ
vēdavādaratāḥ pārtha nānyadastīti vādinaḥ (2.42)

kāmātmānaḥ svargaparā janmakarmaphalapradām
kriyāviśeṣabahulāṁ bhōgaiśvaryagatīm prati (2.43)

bhōgaiśvaryaprasaktānāṁ tayāpahṛtacētasām
vyavasāyātmikā buddhiḥ samādhau na vidhīyatē (2.44)

“Arjuna, those who are obsessed by desires, who look upon heaven as the supreme goal and argue that there is nothing beyond heaven and pleasures and who are devoted to the (mere) letters of the Vedas are unwise. (2.42);

They make such flowery speeches recommending many acts of various

kinds, for the attainment of pleasure and prosperity (here and hereinafter) with rebirth as their motive. (2.43);

Those whose minds are carried away by such flowery words (who are attracted by and attached to pleasures and prosperity) are not well-established in the Self. (2.44)"

"Aiya, whose flowery words Bhagavān is referring to?"

"Steadfast focus on the supreme goal of liberation is the driving force for Karma-Yoga. Bhagavān has already told that only by following the scriptural instruction, one can attain the clear mind and firm intellect necessary to perform Karma-Yoga. However there are those who, having studied some part of the Veda, misdirect others from the path of liberation. Here Bhagavān is pointing to those only."

"Aiya, not every one reads or understands the scriptures. Therefore the guidance from those who are the scholars in scriptural texts is always needed. What is the risk in this?"

"Bhagavān is warning that we should not lend our ears to those words that are wasteful and delusional, even though such words are spoken on citing from the Vedas and other scriptures, if those words lead away from performing Karma-Yoga and the goal of Self-realization."

"What Aiya? Is not the Veda the ultimate guidance to all?"

"Yes, But Veda is like ocean, offering various guidance to various goals. Since worldly pursuits and related goals are innumerable, clearly we need innumerable means to achieve those goals. Veda groups all human goals or '**purushārta**' into four. The primary goal is about security for the embodied living, in other words the means or '**arthā**' to meet the survival needs. Once the survival needs are attained, we seek enjoyment and therefore our goal is for 'pleasures' or '**kāmā**'. Do you understand?"

"Yes Aiya"

"When you are hungry, a piece of bread is your goal but when the hunger is overcome, the bread is not good enough as your taste buds seek variety. Such is our desire of more and more pleasures in the worldly objects."

“What is wrong in that Aiya? Is not life for enjoyment?”

“Absolutely. Embodied life is only for enjoyment. This is where the third goal, although third in this order, but always specified as the foremost goal for every being is ‘**dharma**’, the righteousness. We are free to enjoy our life only when the means are righteous.”

“How does Veda help in guiding us in the pursuit of worldly pleasures?”

“Well, our own efforts is the foremost requirement for any attainment in this world. So act first. Put the right efforts. But one does not operate totally independently in this world. Everything is connected with everything else in some form. So the ‘right timing’, ‘right atmosphere’ and alike are conditions that also need to support. Veda provides a means to seek and secure such right conditions for our actions. Positive outcome of our actions in the form of ‘**punyaā**’ is also to be accumulated for happiness in life hereinafter. Guidance to support such virtuous life in this world and life hereinafter is given in the first-part of Veda, known as ‘Vedapurva’ or ‘**Karma-Kanda**’. Naturally this is the voluminous part of the scriptures.”

“Aiya, Karma-Kanda is therefore important to guide us in our life, right?”

“Of course it is important and one should follow the scriptures to lead a happy life on earth. But there comes a time to ponder over the dwelling in the endless cycle of birth and death. The ‘Heavens’ that are spoken in the Karma-Kanda are the worlds of existence only for temporal experience of nice things; once the accumulated ‘**punyaā**’ is exhausted, one needs to be reborn to continue the sojourn in Samsārā. Here Bhagavān is showing how to transcend Samsārā.”

“It is also revealed in the Veda, right?”

“Yes, the ultimate goal is ‘**mokshaā**’ the finest of ‘**purushārta**’ which is given in the last part of Veda, known as ‘**Vedanta**’ or the ‘**Upanishad**’. Bhagavān is referring to those scholars who dwell only in the Karma-Kanda and using the knowledge therein, instruct others also to remain only within the scope of Karma-Kanda.”

“Aiya, for ordinary people, such discrimination is not possible.”

“Yes, Discriminating and discarding those who do not follow the scriptures and speak only of material world is not difficult. But discriminating those who,

based on their partial understanding of Veda, steer others to dwell only in worldly pleasures and away from the spiritual progress is quite hard. That is why Bhagavān is warning - when one has attained the state like Arjuna, knowing the entrapment of Samsārā and seeking a cure for permanent freedom, then seeking the right knowledge is paramount. If the instructions of Veda to pursue spiritual progress are not taken, then we get swayed by indiscriminate discourses, wandering for indefinite goals.”

“How is this explained by Bhagavān, Aiya?”

“Well, Bhagavān marks those who sway from the spiritual progress with certain adjectives. Firstly they are ‘*avipaschitah*’ - meaning ‘misdirected’ or ‘foolish’ people but hard to discard. Why? It is because they use enchanting words, and remain as ‘*veda-vada-rataha*’, enjoying the debates based on what they know from their partial understanding from Karma-Kanda, for worldly pleasures through accumulation of ‘*punya*’. For this reason, they remain as ‘*nanyad asti ti vadinhā*’, or the perpetual advocates of only Samsārā. For them spiritual knowledge is unimportant or secondary; rituals are the only focus. The reason they are alike because they are also full of such desires ‘*kāma-ātmanah*’ and their desire is only on the life in Heavens, ‘*svargapara*’. That is why they are only temporal pleasure seekers and also direct others into their hold with the Heavens as the final goal.”

“Aiya, everyone is seeking joy in this world and after death. So naturally the words of those who offer the ways through rituals etc are indeed enchanting”, I said.

“Yes, that is why Bhagavān says those words are enchanting as flowers. But the implied meaning is those are like flowers that bear no fruits. Those instructions only lead to Samsārā. For achieving happiness, those instructions push one to many directions with many diverse pursuits, ‘*kriya visesha bahulam*’ all trapping us in more and more into Samsārā. That is why those who do not take up the spiritual path, even by doing many religious rituals, end up with scattered goals, perpetually pursuing with vacillating mind and unsteady intellect.”

“Aiya, how do we then get the steadfast focus and clear intellect?”

traiguṇyaviṣayā vēdā nistraiguṇyō bhavārjuna
nirdvandvō nityasattvasthō niryōgakṣēma ātmavān (2.45)

“Vedas (the part that deal with Karma) dwell on the results of three

guna, (the modalities of nature); you be above these three, O Arjuna. Free yourself from the pairs of opposites and ever remain in the quality of sattwa (goodness), freed from actions to acquire and preserve (material possessions) and be established in the Self. (2.45)"

"The modalities of nature which is defined as three distinct and often mixed qualities results in the world and all worldly activities. Therefore Bhagavān by using the phrase '**traigunya vishaya**', refer to world of things - and as Samsārā. This being the core topic of Karma-Kanda and those driven by desires of worldly pleasures perform desirous actions, thus perpetually committing into Samsārā. They will not have the steadfast intellect for liberation as they have not transcended to assimilate the truth of Vedanta. Arjuna should therefore not fall into those worldly pleasures but seek the eternal bliss and liberation."

"What are these three modalities of nature or the **guna**?"

"The building block of our inherent nature is termed as 'guna'. Scriptures enumerate those as 'triguna' or three attributes. Our inability to discriminate good from bad, right from wrong, eternal from temporal are due to ignorance, which is the resultant of these three guna. But this inherent nature can be, and should be, nurtured for knowledge. We are going to learn about this in great details from Bhagavān. For now briefly let me explain to you what the guna are."

"Please Aiya"

"The '**satva-guna**' is that which conditions for 'knowledge and peace'. The '**rajo-guna**' is about 'desire and action' and the '**tamo-guna**' about 'inertia and inaction'. Our mind is always gripped with the influence of one of these guna at any moment; their mixed exploit becomes our very nature. Therefore each guna binds us. The tamo-guna binds us in dullness with inertia and laziness; the rajo-guna binds us in grief by provoking actions out of desires. Although superior, the satva-guna also binds us in perpetual search for virtues. Total liberation means transcending the influence of all these gunas."

"Is it possible, if these are the modalities of nature? Will that not amount to transcending nature?"

"That is why we should take the meaning of what Bhagavān said here. only as to elevate oneself to remain in 'satva-guna'. Later Bhagavān will also show how transcending the guna is being one with one's true-self."

“Given such composition of guna in our nature, how do we gain steadfast focus on our goal?”

“Bhagavān gives few important ‘*sādhana*’ or prescribed-steps to achieve steadfast intellect and unitive thinking.”

“What are these steps Aiya?”

“What is in question is the power of mind, keeping its focus on the supreme goal of Self-realization. Therefore the steps needed are all related to nurturing our minds. To discard all impediments, the foremost requirement is ‘dispassion’ or ‘*vairāgya*’. This is important.”

“How to develop dispassion, vairāgya?”

“For this, we need another practice which Bhagavān indicates as ‘*nirdvantaha*’, being equipoised at the pairs of opposites. This is accepting both pairs of opposites: good and bad, pain and pleasure, victory and defeat, all as part of nature. Such acceptance is the essential ability to develop dispassion.”

“How can we develop such equipoise for the acceptance of whatever that comes?”

“This is possible only when we apply the third practice: ‘*nitya-satva-svabhava*’, by being in the ‘satva-guna’ at all times.”

“How could we always remain in satva-guna?”

“Bhagavān also gives the underlying quality for this. It is called ‘*nir-yoga-kshema*’. That is not seeking to ‘earn’ and to ‘keep’ more than what is absolutely essential for one’s livelihood. Simple living is indicated. That will curtail greed and limit, and finally eliminate, desire-filled actions. In other words, it is about moving away from the ‘rajo-guna’ by regulating it. This provides space for filling our mind with satva-guna.”

“Aiya, how is such regulation of rajo-guna achieved?”

“Well, this is the most fundamental. For this to happen, we need to be alert at all times. Bhagavān says ‘*atmavan-bhava*’ meaning to be always aware and mindful of the goal. Being alert means, not succumbing to laziness or inaction. That

means giving up tamo-guna.”

“Aiya, all these therefore mutually inclusive?”

“Yes, by being alert at all times, the tamo-guna is reduced. Therefore rajo-guna is free from inertia, allowing actions to be done well. But by adapting to simple life, rajo-guna is also regulated, as personal actions are only done to support the essential needs of life. That allows for the satva-guna to expand. By being filled with ‘satva-guna’, it becomes natural for us to remain equipoise and to accept whatever comes. That leads to dispassion, to be free of attachment and aversion. Once dispassion is our quality, we are well equipped to have steadfast focus and clear intellect; these are the essential qualities to take us to path of Self-realization.”

“Aiya, Does it mean, for those who attain such steadfast focus on liberation, the rituals and pursuit of punyā to go to heavens, are not important, right?”

*yāvānartha udapānē sarvataḥ samplutōdakē
tāvānsarvēṣu vēdēṣu brāhmaṇasya vijānataḥ (2.46)*

“To the Seer of the Self, all the Vedas are of as much use as is a paddle of water in a place where there is a abundance of water (2.46)”.

“Yes, That is one of the grandest benefits of Karma-Yoga. Bhagavān concludes the benefit of Karma-Yoga by saying that it leads to the path of liberation, free of all worries. This is the central point. This he gives by a striking example. When there is a vast reservoir of water, what benefit is there of tiny paddle of water! Such is the use of Veda to the Seer of the Self, the one who has attained the Ātma-jnānam, as he is full like a reservoir, one with all pervading Brahman.”

“Aiya, is Bhagavān compares to the Karma-Kanda of Veda only?”

“Most definitely the teachings of Karma-Kanda and the benefits therein are of no use to the Seer of the Self. So it is certainly implied. We can also take it that the entire Veda is of no use anymore to the One, who is one with one’s true nature - Ātma. We must not take it as an insult to Veda but to indicate the most supreme nature of the Seer of the Self.”

“How is Karma-Yoga done?”

“Bhagavān gives an important hint on this now.”

karmaṇyēvādhikārastē mā phalēṣu kadācana
mā karmaphalahēturbhūrmā tē saṅgōstvakarmaṇi (2.47)

“Your right is to work only, but never to claim its fruits. (so) May your motives for actions be not for the fruit of actions; nor let your attachment be to inaction. (2.47)”

“This is the most profound statement by Bhagavān defining Karma-Yoga. This is elaborated later so we briefly understand the import. Bhagavān says that we all have the ‘freewill’ or the ‘choice-to-action’ but not on the outcome.”

“What do you mean by choice-to-action?”

“You can decide to do an action or not to do an action. You can also decide to do an action in this way or that way. You have all the options on the action before its execution. That is ‘freewill’. It is the privilege made available only to human-beings; All other beings act by their sensory impulses and not by freewill. Only when there is freewill, there is goal. That is why human-beings alone can set goals and work for the goals with the actions by their freewill. That special honour should be thankfully acknowledged and leveraged well.”

“Aiya, I understand. But why I have no right over the outcome of my action? Is it because the outcome is determined by God? If so, what is the point of me doing any action?”

“This is not what Bhagavān says. The result is not predetermined by GOD. Such fatalistic approach is not conveyed. What Bhagavān says is that it is not only your efforts but there are other factors which are not in your choice or control that influence the outcome of your action. That’s why you don’t have a choice over the outcome or to claim ownership for the outcome. So there is no excuse to be fatalistic and giving up efforts but to own up life and life-actions.”

“So we take the result of our action as a chance outcome, right?”

“In a way it is. Since there are unpredictable factors that influence any action, there is no point in claiming right over the outcome; instead it is prudent to accept whatever the outcome be. The best is to consider the outcome as the gift of God, ‘**Ishvarapradash**'; such an attitude marks the character of a Karma-Yogi.”

“What is the benefit of such approach?”

“This would mean, every action is simply a duty discharged, every outcome is a reward; by de coupling the ownership of action from that of the result, one is able treat whatever comes in life as something to be readily accepted. This is a tremendous progress.”

“Aiya, if a man has to work without any desire for the results, how then should he go about it?”

yōgasthaḥ kuru karmāṇī saṅgam̄ tyaktvā dhanañjaya
siddhyasiddhyōḥ samō bhūtvā samatvam yōga ucyatē (2.48)

dūrēṇa hyavaram karma buddhiyōgāddhanañjaya
buddhau śaraṇamanviccha kṛpaṇāḥ phalahētavaḥ (2.49)

“Perform your actions, O Dhananjaya (Arjuna), being established in or integrated with Yoga, abandoning attachment and remaining even-minded both in success and failure. This Evenness of mind is called Yoga. (2.48);

O Arjuna, far inferior, indeed, is mere action, to action performed with evenness of mind. (2.49)”

“Bhagavān now gives another definition of Yoga as the ‘evenness of mind’. Such an evenness of mind in accepting whatever comes becomes easier when one considers the result of action as the reward or Ishvaraprasad. Only thus one can remain unconcerned as to success and failure. But for those who take ownership of action, accepting the result if it is not as expected, is grief.”

“Why Aiya?”

“If you consider yourself only as an instrument for the results, you do not have a problem. But if you think you own the action and the results, then there is attachment. Therefore renunciation of attachment to the anxieties for the results is vital.”

“What would then be the motivation of action?”

“You don’t need motivation any more. Every action will be performed as an ‘in-

spired action' and as an 'inspired performer', you will not worry about the success or failure for your action. Such state of mind is Yoga and action with such state of mind is Karma-Yoga."

"Is not caring about the result of an action callousness?"

"No, not caring the results of an action should not be taken to callousness or indifference but as the total devotion to the action with the willingness to accept whatever be the outcome."

"What is the result of performing one's duty with such evenness of mind."

buddhiyuktō jahātīha ubhē sukṛtaduṣkṛtē
tasmādyōgāya yujyasva yōgaḥ karmasu kauśalam (2.50)

"Endowed with evenness of mind, one casts off the false-identity and as a result in this very life discard both good and evil deeds. Therefore, devote yourself to Yoga (of equanimity); skill in action lies in the practice of this Yoga. (2.50)"

"Bhagavān says 'devote yourself to the yoga of equanimity' i.e. remain continuously even-minded. Work that otherwise enslaves, becomes a means to freedom when performed with evenness of mind. Work becomes worship. Skill-in-action, therefore, depends on the practice of such equanimity in both success and failure. Thus we have another definition of yoga as skill-in-action."

"Skill in action – does it mean the 'subject-expertise' relating to the action?"

"No, Bhagavān uses the term '**kaushalam**' or the 'skill in action' to denote the ability to detach the mind. Bhagavān Sanakara says 'skill in action' is the approach to work by which one converts the action as a means to liberation. It is such a beautiful definition because, when we perform with attachment, we get anxiety and stress moving us away from freedom. Therefore 'skill in action' is the ability to apply our attitude to be free from the risk of bondage. That attitude is simply performing for the action sake only."

"Aiya, How does action lead to liberation?"

karmajam buddhiyuktā hi phalam tyaktvā manīśināḥ
janmabandhavinirmuktāḥ padam gacchanyanāmayam (2.51)

“The wise, possessed of equanimity, having abandoned the fruits of their actions and being freed from the fetters of birth, attain the state that is beyond all evil (reaches the blissful supreme state). (2.51)”

Aiya said.

“The healthy attitude required for Karma-Yoga comes from the intellectual conviction that the most valuable reward from action is to purify the mind for furthering spiritual progress. Owning the fruits of actions means the accumulation of ‘Karma-phalam’ as ‘*vāsanā*’ which has to be exhausted by embodied experience only, which means remaining in the cycle of births and deaths. But when there is no attachment, no matter what the action is, it is not binding.”

“Aiya, so knowing that you are not the owner of the action or the result enables to act as a yogi which releases from the bondage, right?”

“Yes, that is why knowledge is superior to action. As a positive consequence, selfless actions purify the mind and equip the individual to further progress along the spiritual path.”

“Aiya, how does Karma-Yoga cleanse the mind?”

“Mind becomes free of ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’; so grief does not come. When mind is free of worries, there is no delusion.”

*yadā tē mōhakalilam buddhirvyatitarisyati
tadā gantāsi nirvēdam śrōtavyasya śrutasya ca (2.52)*

“When your mind crosses beyond the mire of delusion, then you shall achieve indifference regarding things already heard and things yet to be heard. (2.52)”

“We have already learnt delusion, ‘mohā’, is the state of confused intellect which sees the right as wrong and vice versa. Deluded intellect degrades ones progress in life. We also learnt that the cause for delusion is grief or ‘*shokā*’. Grief is caused by ‘*rāgā*’, the attachment. Therefore if the mind is free and beyond the touch of delusion, it implies transcending the root causes of shokā and rāgā. That is liberation. This is what is being said.”

“Aiya, what does Bhagavān mean by ‘things already heard’ and ‘yet to be heard’?”

“Things already heard refers to things that have been already experienced by all the sense-organs; in other words what all have been experienced in this life so far; Things yet to be heard similarly refers to all the experiences in the future that are due to the Karma-phalam. When the mind is pure one does not worry about the past or anxious about the future. The present is all there is and there too, one remains as an unattached actor. That is liberation in this life itself.”

“When will this occur? How long does it take to attain such freedom?”

“Freedom can occur in a flash of a moment, at any moment. But what takes time is to prepare ourselves to recognize it, which requires unblemished mind that is forever at equipoise. So the question is how long does it take to achieve such a state of mind? That depends on how intense is your purpose and the practice. By Karma-Yoga one attains the purity of mind. You must also understand freedom is not going away from the world but while living here, remaining unaffected by what all happening. One who is liberated thus is the Yogi.”

śrutivipratipannā tē yadā sthāsyati niścalā
samādhāvacalā buddhistadā yōgamavāpsyasi (2.53)

“When your mind, now perplexed by what you have heard, stands firm and steady in the Self, then you will have attained samādhi or Self-Realization. (2.53)”

“Mind which is pure, equipoise and peaceful, even when engaged in external transactions because of its unattached attitude, belongs to a Yogi. Such a mind remains in ‘**samādhi**’. Here Bhagavān use the term samādhi only to refer the Ātma. The mind of the Yogi readily abides in the Ātma.”

“I thought samādhi refers to being without worldly consciousness?”

“Samādhi is not the loss of consciousness, but being full of consciousness, tuned completely for the communion within the Self.”

“How does one become aware that one has attained self-realization?”

“This is an important question. Self-realization is inhibited by two inherent doubts even for the sincere seekers: one is ‘**samsaya**’ or ‘doubt’ - have I attained the true knowledge, have I realized the Self - etc. Such doubts always linger. Another inhibitor is ‘**viparyaya**’, the strong notion that there needs to be some

external attainment for ‘Self-realization’, wishing to have some mystical experience or some wonderful vision etc. We need some tools to resolve these doubts. Bhagavān will provide these tools in due course. Here by using the phrase ‘*nis-chala*’, such a doubtless conviction is indicated for the Yogi”.

“What are the tools to resolve those self doubts?”, I could not wait.

“We shall wait for Bhagavān to teach us later in the discourse.”

With the smile, Aiya continued.

“Bhagavān has thus concluded indicating the glory of Karma-Yoga and how it provides the way for us to prepare ourselves to acquire the knowledge of the Self. In fact, Bhagavān has beautifully given the essence of whole Veda. Ātma-jnānam, the essence of Vedanta, and to qualify for Ātma-jnānam, the essential of Karma-yoga, the essence of Vedapurva were imparted. We have to dwell on our learning so far, reading again and again as required, because only with the understanding, the rest of conversation between Bhagavān and Arjuna will lead to greater elucidation. All our doubts will be thus be cleared; by the assimilation of what we learn, we too can become Yogi and be forever liberated.”

“Aiya, deep indeed are my prayers! May we understand the nature of such Yogi, who is transformed by the knowledge of the Self?”

“This is exactly what Arjuna asks now. Bhagavān will outline how such a noble person amongst us live so that we can revere such Yogi as our role model.”

We immersed in the vision as the last quarter of the long and virtuous night was flowing.

Stitha-prajña - Wise (with Steady-intellect)

arjuna uvāca

s̄thitaprajñasya kā bhāṣā samādhisthasya kēśava
s̄thitadhīḥ kiṁ prabhāṣēta kimāsīta vrajēta kiṁ (2.54)

“Arjuna said

O Keshava, what is the description of him who has steady-wisdom and is merged in the super conscious state (samādhi)? How does one of steady-wisdom speak? How does he sit? How does he walk? (2.54)”

“Arjuna has the same question. How does such a supreme Yogi looks like, walks like, speaks like? He wants to identify such person and follow. It is also very important to understand how well Arjuna has been following the teachings so far. This is indicated how he uses apt adjectives to denote the Yogi, whose characteristics he is seeking. He calls the Yogi as ‘**stitha-prajna**’ one who has ‘clear and steadfast intellect’; also as ‘**s̄thithdhee**’, one who has ‘doubtless and fully convinced knowledge’ and ‘**samaadhisthasya**’, one who is ‘abiding in the Self’. His choice of words already contain the answers he is looking for.”

Aiya added.

“Arjuna may also be thinking: if an Yogi remains unattached to the worldly pursuits, why does he anymore live in the society and interact with worldly affairs! Should he not shun the world, withdraw from activities and remain in a secluded place, resting in samādhi? If so, should I not follow such path of renunciation instead of fighting the war. So he wants to know the physical and psychological state and the actions of such Yogi. Bhagavān is therefore giving the characteristics of the person of such ‘steady-wisdom.’”

śrībhagavānuvāca

prajahāti yadā kāmānsarvānpārtha manōgatān
ātmanyēvātmanā tuṣṭaḥ s̄thitaprajñastadōcyatē (2.55)

"Sri Bhagavān said

O Partha, a person who is blissful and fulfilled in the communion with the Self alone and therefore casts off all desires of the mind is called the person of steady-wisdom. (2.55)"

"Bhagavān answers the first question of Arjuna about the person with steady-wisdom. The word **stitha-prajna** should be first understood for its contextual meaning. The term '**prajna**' refers to one who has complete knowledge about the 'goal', more specifically about 'Ātma'. This would make the person, firstly as a Seeker for attaining the necessary qualifications to know about Ātma and then to obtain the knowledge under the tutelage of an able teacher. But having the knowledge of the goal is one thing, and assimilating the knowledge to realize the goal is the other. Unlike material goals, where attainment of an object or objective experience marks the end of the goal, in Self-realization, one does not attain any thing new, one does not get any external object or any objective experience, because one simply realizes the supreme nature of oneself. Such supreme nature is not attained but what is the very nature, which remained so long as unknown due to ignorance. So when the Seeker with the '**prajna**', focuses persistently to assimilate this knowledge to remain one with one's true nature, then he is '**stitha-prajna**'. The realization makes him the 'Seer' but to remain in that state of fullness, the 'Seer' also keeps steadfast focus and so remains as '**stitha-prajna**'. In the case of 'Seeker', the 'steadfast assimilation' of the knowledge is called '**sādhana**' or 'practise' and for the 'Seer' as '**nishtā**' of the 'steady-state'"

"Aiya, therefore here Arjuna is asking about the Seer who is already the Ātma-jnāni' ?"

"Yes, he wants to know how such a Seer perform action in this world. In other words, Arjuna wants to know the ripen state of Karma-Yogi, who has attained self-realization. Will such Yogi continue to perform action? That may be his drive to ask the question."

I was absorbing, while Aiya continued.

"We should also infer how a person attains such a steady-wisdom by performing Karma-Yoga. As a Karma-yogi, he performs due actions without desires. Having attained dispassion, he is free from blemishes in mind and receives Ātma-jnānam from the able teacher. In this process, his steady-wisdom grants emotional freedom, the freedom to be untouched by the affliction of emotions such

as anger, grief, fear, greed etc.”

“Aiya, I still remain worried about the preliminary requirements. Being desire less - is such ideal possible? Should I not have any desire at all in life?”

“No, there are desires that are legitimate to meet the essential existence and discharge of duties, like providing necessities of life. But such legitimate desires should be appropriate and not impinging upon the spiritual progress. In all such cases, those necessary desires should be treated as disposable goals to be ended by actions that are unbinding. On the contrary, there should be desire to learn, desire to spiritual progress, desire to serve others, desire to pray etc. and such virtuous desires are called ‘*shudda-kāma*’ which are necessary to propel towards spiritual progress. Here Bhagavān is saying that the person of steady-wisdom has only ‘shudda-kāma’ and casts off all other desires that are binding.”

duḥkhēśvanudvignamanāḥ sukhēśu vigataspr̥hah
vītarāgabhayakrōdhah sthitadhīrmunirucyatē (2.56)

“He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after pleasures and who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady-wisdom. (2.56)”

“Bhagavān now answers the second part of Arjuna’s question relating to the conduct of the man of steady-wisdom. Such person is emotionally free. Emotional freedom based on intellectual conviction is emphasised here. Therefore person of steady-wisdom remains undisturbed in sorrow or in joy, unattached, fearless and without anger; He is the ‘*Muni*’ - a sage, a man of steady-wisdom.”

“Aiya, what is emotional freedom?”

“It is state of being insulated from the impact of our weakening emotions that come and go. It is the ability to remain as an unattached observer of all emotions. That is only possible when our self-identity is discriminated from the mind, the Anātma and identified with the ever witnessing consciousness, the Ātma. do you understand?”

“Yes Aiya.”

“Bhagavān only points to the three emotions that are absent in a Muni: attachment, fear and anger. These are inter-related and also the cause for other nega-

tive emotions such as greed, avarice etc. We must also understand that dispassion and emotional freedom do not mean lack of empathy or being insensitive to others. A Muni is forever happy and therefore he is full of love and generous in giving love to all. Remember only when you are happy, you are able to give love. Giving love is freedom, seeking love is not freedom. Therefore blissful and loving nature is the mark of the Seer.”

yah sarvatrānabhisnē hastattatprāpya śubhāśubham
nābhinandati na dvēṣṭi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā (2.57)

“He who is not attached to anything, who neither rejoices nor is, vexed when he obtains good or evil - his wisdom is firmly fixed. (2.57)”

“Bhagavān now answers to Arjuna’s query about the speech of a perfect master. Dispassionate in action, he does not change in his fulfilled state of mind, by whatever pleasure or pain comes as experience. Therefore, his nature of being kind and loving always exist. So the speech of the Seer is always kind and healing. This we can deduce. Evenness of mind means, the Seer never reacts to sway from the inherent loving nature.”

“How does such steadfast focus is sustained?”

yadā saṃpharatē cāyam kūrmō’ṅgānīva sarvaśah
indriyāṇīndriyārthēbhyaḥasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā (2.58)

viṣayā vinivartantē nirāhārasya dēhinah
rasavarjam rasō’pyasya param dṛṣṭvā nivartatē (2.59)

“When like the tortoise which withdraws its limbs on all sides, he withdraws his senses from the sense objects, then his wisdom becomes steady. (2.58);

The objects of the senses fall away from the abstinent man but not the taste for them. But even the taste falls away when the Supreme is seen. (2.59)”

“Bhagavān now states that a man of steady-wisdom has the capacity to withdraw his sense organs from the field of their objects just like a tortoise can draw back its limbs from all sides within its shell when apprehending danger. This is only an example. Unlike the gross organs of tortoise that could be suppressed from

their actions, the subtle sense organs are not suppressed from their natural svadharma of gathering and reporting sensory impulses. Yoga calls this as ‘*dama*’, as an important exercise for sensory control. It is when the mind that comprehends the impulses does not give precedence to those triggers. Such mastery of the mind is implied and it is not about the annihilation of sensory powers.”

“How is it done Aiya? Just by will power?”

“Bhagavān says the difference between a Yogi and ordinary person in controlling sense impulses. The power of will is important to have control over the sense-organs but it is not exercised by brute force. It is not about forcefully suppressing the sensory impulses for the sake of doing. Such practice bears no spiritual progress. It is because, even for those who forcefully resist sensory impulses, the sensory organs will leave behind the taste of their senses, eventually to evoke the mind, perhaps more aggressively to those tastes in the future. On the contrary, Yogi does not suppresses the sensory impulses but by keeping his mental and intellectual faculties focused in the higher goals, the sensory triggers fall in vain without getting due attention. Even when such sensory triggers are received by the mind, the Yogi is able to apply dispassion, thereby not losing the emotional freedom.”

“So Aiya, is it wrong to control senses during the meditation? I try to do but often fail.”

“Sensory control is essential discipline. But it is possible and sustainable only when the mind is peaceful. This is called ‘*sama*’ or ‘mental serenity’. We are going to learn all these techniques for our application soon. The main import from Bhagavān is that there is a difference between outer abstention and inner renunciation. You may reject an object outwardly but still carrying a lingering desire in the mind. That does not help. Renunciation in the mind is the key for mastering over the senses. Thus in the restraint of the senses evinced by the Yogi not only the sense objects turn away from him but also attachment itself with its roots vanish.”

“Aiya, is attachment still a latent danger for a Yogi?”

“Yes, but only if the Yogi does not keep a tight watch.”

yatatō hyapi kauntēya puruṣasya vipaścitaḥ
indriyāṇī pramāṭhīṇī haranti prasabhaṁ manaḥ (2.60)

“The turbulent senses, O son of Kunti, do violently carry away the mind even of a wise man though he may be striving to control them. (2.60)”

“Bhagavān has so far emphasized that a perfect master is the one who has a complete control over his sense-cravings - which are like turbulent horses. If these horses are not kept under control, the rider, the mind may not reach the desired destination safely. On the contrary, the rider is tossed out. With this example, it is indicated that even a man of discrimination falls prey to the temptations of the world. Therefore, the aspirant must not relax his effort for self-control. He should bring all the senses under his control; otherwise his mind will be dragged into the field of sense objects leading to a sorrowful experience. This is more likely to happen even to a highly evolved seeker whereby he will not be able to reach his spiritual destination of final liberation. This is an advice of caution to the seeker.”

“What should one do when senses are restrained?”

tāni sarvāṇi saṃyamya yukta āśīta matparaḥ
vaśē hi yasyēndriyāṇi tasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā (2.61)

“Having restrained all the senses he should sit steadfast, intent on Self; his wisdom is steady whose senses are under control. (2.61)”

“Bhagavān warns Arjuna here that as a seeker of Self-perfection he should control his mind by withdrawing all his sense organs from their wanderings and should concentrate his entire attention on the ‘Ātma’. Such a Yogi, having brought under control all his senses, is called the ‘stitha-prajna’, or the ‘Seer’.”

After a pause, Aiya said. “Attachment is that which makes even a careless Yogi to fall from the spiritual progress. So understanding the power of attachment, and its rise and fall are important.”

“Aiya, Why do we have attachment to things?”

dhyāyatō viśayānpum̄saḥ saṅgastēśūpajāyatē
saṅgātsaṅjāyatē kāmaḥ kāmātkrōdhō’bhijāyatē (2.62)

krōdhādbhavati sammōhaḥ sammōhātsmṛtivibhramah
smṛtibhramśād buddhināśō buddhināśātpraṇāsyati (2.63)

“When a man thinks of objects, attachment for them arises; from attachment desire is born; from desire arises anger. (2.62);

From anger comes delusion, from delusion the loss of memory, from the loss of memory the destruction of intelligence; from the destruction of intelligence he perishes. (2.63)”

“Attachment is born out of ignorance or ‘**avidya**’ which actually means not identifying the true Self. Therefore we become miserable and to compensate our misery and fear, we seek pleasures and security. We apply our senses for material rescue and by constant thinking of the alluring features of the sense objects, there is a thickened version of emotions, formed as attachment. Attachment gives birth to desires to own, enjoy, protect those sensory objects. In this process come the emotions full of anxiety, fear, possessiveness, rage, avarice etc. Eventually all these lead to grief and delusion. Moral degradation happens and once that becomes the way of life, one is truly sunk in deep despair.”

“Aiya, by having the right desires, ‘shudda-kama’, one could counter such decline, right?”

“Exactly. Desires can elevate us as well as destroy us. With ‘shudda-kama’, our actions are oriented towards positive impact. So the lesson is, let the senses do what they need to do, but with our mind and freewill, let us create circumstances where the sensory impulses could only lead to virtuous actions and spiritual goals. In any case, when the steadfast focus is on the Self, the desires do no harm. This is what the Yogi does. He does not destroy senses or the mind but transforms them to orient only to the best for spiritual progress.”

rāgadvēśavimuktaistu viṣayānindriyaiścaran
ātmavaśyairvidhēyātmā prasādamadhigacchati (2.64)

“But the self-controlled man, moving among objects with his senses under restraint and free from both attraction and repulsion, attains peace. (2.64)”

“Bhagavān now answers the last of Arjuna’s question as to how does the man of steady-wisdom move about. He moves about, unaffected by anything. The mind and the senses are endowed with the two natural currents of attraction and repulsion but those are completely muted in the Yogi. To the Yogi, the senses and

the mind are mere tools and he as the Master, uses those to the only supreme goal - to be one with one's true self - Ātma.”

“Aiya when the sensory impulses are controlled, what happens to the mind?”

“Mind is free of all disturbances and therefore attains serenity, a peaceful state. This wonderful benefit is considered as a divine gift, ‘*Prasāda*’.”

prasādē sarvaduḥkhānām hānirasyōpajāyatē
prasannacetasō hyāśu buddhiḥ paryavatiṣṭhatē (2.65)

*“In that divine benefit (*prasāda*) of serenity there is an end of all sorrow; for the intelligence of the man of serene mind soon becomes steady. (2.65)”*

“Bhagavān calls the peace of mind as the divine ‘*prasāda*’. Peace is true happiness. Sensory pleasures have polarised opposites. But when these emotions are equally treated and surpassed, one is eternally blissful which is called ‘*ānanda*’. That is peace. That is *prasāda*. For others, no matter how much of material objects is in their hold, happiness is not possible. Calm mind is essential.”

“Aiya, is that why we should do meditation?”

“How could you sit on a meditation to attain peace, when your mind is full of emotions, swayed by sensory desires? One has to first perform Karma-Yoga to clear the impurities of our thoughts and the swelling of emotions. Then only the practice of ‘*Japa*’, ‘*Dhyāna*’ and such meditative exercises are to be taken up. Listen to Bhagavān”.

nāsti buddhirayuktasya na cāyuktasya bhāvanā
na cābhāvayataḥ śāntiraśāntasya kutaḥ sukham (2.66)

“The man whose mind is not under his control has no Self-Knowledge and to the unsteady no meditation is possible and so to such person there can be no peace and to the one who has no peace how can there be any happiness ? (2.66)”

“The unsteady mind cannot practice meditation. The mind which cannot be focused on meditation cannot acquire the knowledge of the Self. Desire to realize the true self should be the driving force and the prescribed steps of purifying the

physical and mental faculties to support the yogic practices must be done. Steps to take for these practices, we will learn from Bhagavān. Right now, to differentiate the glory of the Yogi, Bhagavān says, for the uncontrolled, there is no peace in the mind and therefore there is no way of being one with one's true nature. So everlasting happiness is forever elusive to them."

indriyāñāṁ hi caratāṁ yanmano'nuvidhīyatē
tadasya harati prajñāṁ vāyurnāvamivāmbhasi (2.67)

tasmādyasya mahābāhō nigṛhitāni sarvaśah
indriyāñāndriyārthēbhystasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā (2.68)

"When the mind runs after the wandering senses, it carries away his discrimination as the wind carries away a boat on the waters. (2.67);

"Therefore, O Mighty Armed Arjuna, his wisdom is steady whose senses are completely restrained from their objects. (2.68)"

"When the mind is constantly attached to the sense objects and moves only in pursuit of such objects, it loses control and direction. Just as a gale carries away a rudderless ship from its charted course and drives her away from reaching its destination, so too the unsteady mind carries away the aspirant from his spiritual path and turns him towards the worldly objects by taking away his discrimination. He thus gives up the steadfast focus, which he has earned by long penance. The advise is therefore not to yield to the sensory temptations, which is the mark of the Seer."

"Now Bhagavān concludes with the praise of those who have acquired such supreme state of existence, being one with one's true nature and simply go about leading their life of actions in Karma-Yoga."

yā niśā sarvabhūtānāṁ tasyāṁ jāgarti samyamī
yasyāṁ jāgrati bhūtāni sā niśā paśyatō munēḥ (2.69)

"In that which is night to all beings, the wise is awake and where all beings are awake, that is the night for the wise who see. (2.69)"

"Aiya, what Bhagavān says sound like a riddle."

“Yes, Bhagavān now speaks about the glory of Ātma-jnāni. This He does by comparing the conduct of Ātma-jnāni to that of an ignorant Samsāri.”

“How Aiya?”

“The Samsāri considers himself as the ‘doer’ and ‘enjoyer’ - the ‘*kartā*’ and ‘*bhokta*’. As the result, he continues to dwell in binding actions while living in the world. In contrast, the Ātma-jnāni has realized that he is neither the doer nor the enjoyer - the ‘akartā’ and ‘abhoktā’ because he does his actions as Karma-Yoga. So nothing binds him. Therefore their perspectives of the world also change. In indicating the difference in their perspectives, Bhagavān shows the glory of Ātma-jnāni.”

I was listening.

“By the term ‘darkness’, Bhagavān indicates ignorance or immunity. By the term ‘light’, Bhagavān indicates ‘knowledge’ or ‘engagement’. Now if we decode what has been said, we may understand better. When it is dark for everyone, yogi is awake as he sees light. When everyone is awake and see light, Yogi is asleep as if it is dark and unattached.”

“Aiya, still not clear to me.”

“We see the world as full of multiple, perishable changes like the waves of the ocean. So our actions and reactions are in response to the changes. As these changes are never ending and varied, our goals and actions are also never ending and varied. On the contrary, the Yogi sees the unchanging and eternal nature of the existence of world (like the water of the ocean) and therefore Yogi is always focused and orient his actions to the unchanging reality. Do you understand?”

“Sort of...”, I doubted my statement.

“Advaitam - the non-dual eternity that pervades everywhere is the supreme truth. The pure existence is undeniable which indwells as Ātma, the ‘Consciousness’ in every being and also pervades as Paramātma or the ‘Universal Consciousness’. All forms and names are only *mityā* - temporal reality and therefore amount to infinite changes. This Ātma-jnānm, the non-dual nature of existence is like a dark night to the ordinary people as they do not comprehend. But for the Yogi, it is like light and he fully engages in that state of eternal

existence. On the contrary, the world of objects with their temporal nature and perpetual changes look eternally real to the Samsāri and he is awake and indulges forever. Yogi on the other hand, see the world as ‘mityā’ and remain unattached as if he is asleep in the darkness. This is the essence of what Bhagavān has said.”

“Aiya, if the Ātma-jnāni sees the world as dark then how does he transact in the world?”

āpūryamāṇamacalapratīṣṭham samudramāpaḥ praviśanti yad-
vat
tadvatkāmā yam̄ praviśanti sarvē sa śāntimāpnōti na kāmakāmī
(2.70)

“He attains peace into whom all desires/experiences enter as the waters from all directions enter the ocean, which is full to the brim and grounded in stillness, but not the man who is the desirer of desires (desiring material pleasures) (2.70)”

“Bhagavān illustrates the glory of Ātma-jnāni by comparing him to the vast ocean and indirectly indicating the Samsāri to a tiny pool of water. In the ocean, many streams of water from many directions merge. But the ocean which is forever full remain unchanged. Only the merging streams of water lose their different identities and become one with the Ocean. Similarly, many and varied are the desires and experiences like streams of water that come into the Yogi but none of these affect the Yogi as he forever remains full of bliss like the ocean. As ‘stitha-prjana’, he is able to always focus and remain one with Ātma, do you understand?”

“Yes Aiya.”

“You can imagine the Samsāri as a pool of water. Unlike the ocean, the pool of water is subject to all sorts of changes depending on what comes into, or what is taken out. It does not remain fulfilled nor remains in its state. That is how Samasāri also lives; Affected by all external events, forever without fulfilment and forever in the cycle of emotions.”

“How does the Ātma-jnāni handle the world?”

vihāya kāmānyaḥ sarvānpumāṁścarati niḥspṛhaḥ
nirmamō nirahaṅkāraḥ sa śāntimadhhigacchati (2.71)

“That man attains peace who, abandoning all desires, moves about without longing, devoid of the sense of ‘I'-ness and ‘my'-ness. (2.71)”

“Bhagavān here reasserts the character of Ātma-jnāni who has given up all desires, living a simple life with complete dispassion. He has no sense of ego and ownership. He is ‘*nirahankāra*’ meaning that he has no pride or ego-sense. He does not beat his drums or exhibit vanity. He does not even project himself as Ātma-jnāni. He is full of humility. The other inference by the term is that he has completely disassociated with the Anātma.”

“Aiya, after giving up everything for attaining the supreme wisdom, how could one not be proud of the achievement?”

“Master of true renunciation is one who is able to keep his act of renunciation a secret. For the Seer, as he is void of any ‘*mamakāra*’ or ‘my-ness’, even renunciation the possessions do not strike any chord. For such a person, detachment in life is natural trait but that will not reflect in any outward action. In other words, such a Master do not lack empathy. He is full of love. By his way of life, the world recognizes his glory. He does not need to speak. By saying thus, Bhagavān has also answered Arjuna’s question on the conduct of those with steadfast wisdom.”

ēṣā brāhmī sthitih pārtha naināṁ prāpya vimuhyati
sthitvāsyāmantakālēpi brahmanirvāṇamṛcchati (2.72)

“This is the Brahmi-state (in the form of Brahman), O Son of Pritha. Upon attaining this, there is no delusion. Being established therein, even at the hour of death, one attains final liberation in Brahman.(2.72)”

“Aiya, is Bhagavān concluding his discourse?”

“Yes, the glory of Ātma-jnāni is thus spoken. Here Bhagavān speaks the glory of the state of such Seer. He uses the term ‘State of Brahmam’ to denote the undivided oneness of the Ātma-jnāni with the supreme universal consciousness. He is forever in that supreme state of awareness and therefore totally liberated from Samsārā. He is called ‘Jivan-mukta’, ‘liberated while alive’. Therefore he is free from the entrapment of rāgā, shokā and mohā, the deluding grip of Samsārā, which is also called ‘vishādam’. Thus Bhagavān has shown by becoming a ‘stithia-prajna’, Arjuna can end his ‘*vishādam*’, the state of delusion he has shown.”

“Aiya, I have spent all my life on other material pursuits. Do I still have a chance of being liberated in this birth itself?”

“Indeed. This is the very important point which is also imparted by Bhagavān. Such a noble state of being one with Ātma – even if it occurs only in the last stages before death, that means, even at our older ages, we can be truly liberated as ‘Videha-mukta’, the one who gains salvation upon death. Bhagavān assures that there is no age limit when one could pursue, attain and assimilate the Ātma-jñānam. May we not rue for what all have happened in our lives so far! May we awake and arise to take up the path to perfection. May we follow Sri Bhagavad-Gita to attain the state of stitha-prjana.”

As Aiya concluded, the night has almost rolled-up its darkness, East showed the crimson rays of the dawn.

A full day to contemplate to return back to witness Kurukshtera - thinking thus, I bowed to Aiya.

ॐ tatsaditi śrīmadbhagavadgītāśūpaniṣatsu
brahmavidyāyāṁ yogaśāstrē śrīkrṣṇārjunasāṁvādē¹
sāṅkhyayogō nāma dvitīyō’ dhyāyah - 2



Thus ends the second chapter named the

‘2. Sāṅkhya-Yoga’

in the Upanishad of the divine Bhagavad-Gita , the knowledge of the Absolute
as the divine conversation between Arjuna and Lord Krishna.

Previous
Part - 01

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Sri Bhagavad-Gita
The Honey-Elixir for Humanity



03: Karma Yōga

Discipline of Action

(Learning Through Conversation)

Prior reading of earlier chapter is recommended

Mee Rajagopalan

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03 May 2020

Version 1.0

o3: Karma Yōga Discipline of Action



O3: Karma Yoga

§ Chapter o3

I have arrived before the Sunset to the banks of river Ganges. The third evening of my journey with Aiya to Kurukshetra and witness the divine conversation between Arjuna and Krishna was unfolding. The last two nights have been luminous with the knowledge of Sri Bhagavad-Gita as we witnessed Arjuna's despondency and how it had turned out to be the glorious opportunity for the pursuit of supreme Knowledge.

The moment Arjuna turned into the most fitting disciple to Krishna, his friend and the willing Chariot-driver, Bhagavān's role has changed to that of Guru,. The transformation of their relationship into Guru-Sishya at once changed Ku-

rukshetra from a place of blood-shed and destruction to a great stage for imparting supreme knowledge.

“Welcome, are you ready”, said Aiya.

“Surely Aiya, My mind is full of what I saw and heard, yet it is longing for more. I cannot wait to continue!”

“Please can you confirm your understanding so far?”, asked Aiya

I was hesitant but said. “Aiya, deluded due to inconsolable grief, caused by attachment, Arjuna was advocating for giving up on his role. To Bhagavān, who was patiently listening, Arjuna exhausted all sorts of arguments to substantiate his position; upon realizing that he has no more to say or offer and in such incapacitated state, ‘*kārpanya-dosha*’, Arjuna surrendered to Bhagavān, giving up his ego and pleading ‘I am your disciple, please clearly tell me what I should do’. Bhagavān, who until then remained as a silent witness in His role of chariot-driver, ascends to be the spiritual preceptor and Guru to Arjuna.”

“Yes! Total Surrender to God and the Learned is the foremost and the biggest strength that one should acquire. Then?”, Aiya said, while seating himself on the usual rock under the Banyan tree. The Sun was setting.

“Aiya, Bhagavān then imparted the supreme knowledge of Ātma. The Self is different from the non-self and this lack of discrimination is the cause of ‘*Samsārā*’. Bhagavān enumerated the glory of Ātma as ‘*Nitya*’ (eternal), ‘*Satyam*’ (Independent-existence), ‘*Akartha*’ (detached from action), ‘*Aboktha*’ (unaffected by results), ‘*Sarvagataḥ*’ (unlimited by space), ‘*Deha-ateeta*’ (beyond all embodiments), ‘*Nirvikāra*’ (transcending time) etc.”

“Yes, for the eternal freedom from Samsārā, one has to realize one’s identity with the Ātma and completely surrender to the Paramātma. This is easier said than done; the preparation to qualify for the knowledge of Ātma requires one to perform one’s duties diligently, and in this process, gain the necessary maturity and qualification. What did Bhagavān say in this regard?”

I felt like a student reporting the home-work to the teacher and it enthralled me as I get the chance to re calibrate my thoughts and understanding on what I have grasped so far and to learn more.

“Aiya, Bhagavān stared Karma-Yōga which is all about doing ones duties, the proper actions with proper attitude, all without any attachment to the results.”

“Proper actions refer to ?”

“Those are obligations that one inherits based on one’s role in the society and also the life-stages. ‘*Svadharma*’ dictates actions that are mandated. We have to understand what these are and duly perform. For example, house-holder should perform daily ‘*panca-māha-yajñā*’, sacrifices with no selfish motives.”

“What happens to those who diligently performs Karma-Yōga?”

“They become Karma-Yōgi capable of attaining the knowledge of the Self and eventually Self-realization. They thus become Liberated and remain free with their resolute-intellect steadfast on the Self.”

“What is the name that Bhagavān gives to them?”

“Bhagavān refers to them as ‘*sthitaprajña*’. Thanks to Arjuna as he wanted to know how such a person will conduct in the world, Bhagavān narrated the attitude and conduct of such Liberated person in the world.”

“Which is...”, Aiya asked.

“Such wise people perform ‘*sādhana*’ to master the control of their senses and mind. Even upon Self-realization, they continue the sādhana, ‘*nididhyāsanam*’ to keep the focus on the Self. Their attitude towards the world is driven by unconditional love. Discharging their duties calmly, they remain ‘*brāhmī-sthitih*’ in the state of Brahman. I am so assured when Bhagavān declared one that can take up the pursuit of Self-realization at any age as attaining such a state even at the old age before giving up the embodiment is liberation. Therefore I am hopeful.”

“Very well, Let us now continue our journey. May we pray for the benign grace of the Lord and the great Seers for endowing us with the tranquillity of mind and sharpness of intellect for the absorption of knowledge; May we have the strength to assimilate! May we recite the enchanting prayers on Sri Bhagavad-Gita, rendered by the great soul, Sri Madhusudhana Saraswathi”. Saying thus, Aiya closed his eyes and started reciting the shlokā. I too joined him.

§ Prayer 3

Oṁ

*prapanna-parijātāya totra-vetraika-pāṇaye
jñāna-mudrāya kṛṣṇāya gītāmrta-duhe namaḥ ||3||*

Salutations to Krishna who is the wish-giving tree, Who holds a cane on one and the seal of Jñāna on one had, giving all the nectar of Gita.

Aiya sat down with his eyes closed and said.

“May we pray to Bhagavān Lord Krishna, Who, like the all-granting ‘*Parijātha*’ tree in the heaven, bestows grace to His devotees for their goals, the four *purushāthā*, ‘Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Mōksha.

May we pray to Bhagavān Lord Krishna, who holds the whip in one-hand, controlling the horses of senses and directing the chariot of mind. Bhagavān although has nothing to desire or achieve, yet for the sake of Dharma, performs action, taking up the whip and the job of a chariot-driver.

May we pray to Bhagavān Lord Krishna, who exhibits ‘*chin-mudrā*’, the supreme teaching of Veda, the unification of Jivātmā, with Paramātmā, upon transcending the tri-fold impediments of duality, symbolized by the ‘chin-mudra’.

May we pray to Bhagavān Lord Krishna, Who is attracting all with His enchanting charm, and giving us the elixir of immortality as Sri Bhagavad-Gita!”

Reciting the prayer and contemplating on its essence, I remained with my eyes closed. On the canvas of my mind, emerged the scene of Kurukshetra, coming alive by Sanjaya’s narrations and the insightful interludes of Aiya.



§ Arjuna's Perplexity

Aiya said.

"After listening to Bhagavān on the importance of Knowledge and at the same time the instruction to perform action, Arjuna is perplexed. His confusion is understandable. After all, he has surrendered as a deluded person and sought a way out of the war, that is to give up action. He was listening to Bhagavān only for gathering reasons to give up action. Perhaps owing to this bias, Arjuna did not grasp correctly and that is why he is confused."

"What is the confusion Aiya?"

"Well, Arjuna is holding on to the assertion by Bhagavān that knowledge is superior to action. He is also mindful how Bhagavān has criticised those performing Karma merely for attaining worldly pleasures here and hereinafter. Since knowledge is what is required for freedom, and Karma is binding, then why Bhagavān keeps on insisting to perform action! This puzzles him. 'Why should I take up action if the path of knowledge gives liberation?' - thus thinks Arjuna."

"Aiya, I don't think Bhagavān said that."

"Correct! Bhagavān criticized action that are merely done as Karma; at the same time, Bhagavān spoke about the glory of action when done as Karma-Yōga; Arjuna seems to have missed this point."

Arjuna uvāca

jyāyasī cetkarmaṇaste matā buddhirjanārdana
tatkiṁ karmaṇi ghore mām niyojayasi keśava (3.1)

"Arjuna asked :

O Janārdana, According to You, if (the path of) knowledge is superior to (the path of) action, then why, O Keshava, You are directing me to this terrible action ? (3.1)"

"Arjuna calls Bhagavān as 'Janārdana' as the One who fulfils desires and the remover of Samsārā; perhaps he does so to stress upon the point that liberation is

what he is seeking and not doing action. Why then Bhagavān induces to engage in a terrible war. This doubt comes to Arjuna as he has faulty understanding.”

“Why was this a faulty understanding?”

“Bhagavān used the term ‘Buddhi’ as in ‘Buddhi Yōga’, to mean ‘equanimity’. But Arjuna uses the term to mean ‘intellect’ and therefore mistakes that the path of ‘action’ and ‘knowledge’ are somehow mutually exclusive.”

vyāmiśreṇeva vākyena buddhim̄ mohayasīva me
tadekam̄ vada niścītya yena śreyo’hamāpnuyām (3.2)

“It appears (to me) as though with Your apparently contradictory speech, You are confusing my intellect (or understanding). Tell me with certainty that one (way) by which I may attain bliss. (3.2)”

“Arjuna, who started with an accusation, now moderates his statement. He says that the speech of Bhagavān somehow appears to him as contradictory. As a sincere disciple, Arjuna is full of **‘shradda’**; that is why he admits his confusion as due to his improper understanding; he concedes that his intellect is unable to comprehend the truth. A clear instruction from Bhagavān is therefore sought. Also notice, he is NOT asking which path to take: ‘action’ or ‘knowledge’ but reminds Bhagavān of his goal - the supreme bliss. At least, he is clear on this.”

“Yes Aiya.”

“Great teachers don’t just instruct what needs to be done; they also teach why something to be done, and how, when and where. That is the reward of total surrender to the great teacher. Bhagavān now starts a detailed tutorial on Karma-Yōga.”

Śrī Bhagavān uvāca

loke’smin dvividhā niṣṭhā purā proktā mayānagha
jñānaYōgena sāṅkhyānāṁ karmaYōgena Yōginām (3.3)

“Bhagavān said:

O Sinless! Already I have shown that there is two-fold path in this world; that

of Sankhyās by the Discipline of Knowledge, and that of Yōgins by the Discipline of Action. (3.3)"

"Aiya, what is Bhagavān saying?"

"Bhagavān recalls that He has already indicated about two distinct life-styles and two necessary disciplines. The life-style is a choice and it is not important but the disciplines or 'sādhana' are critical."

"I don't follow Aiya."

"Bhagavān uses the term '**nisthā**' to refer to particular ways of conducting one's life. One is '**pravṛiti-nisthā**' in which one leads a life transacting in the world by acquiring worldly objects for the well-being of oneself and others. The other is opposite, known as '**nivṛiti-nisthā**', in which renunciation of worldly objects is the dominant way of life."

"Aiya, Is Bhagavān referring to the life-style of ordinary people and that of '**sanyāsi**'?"

"Bhagavān is referring to the life-style of house-holder as **pravṛiti-nisthā**. Families are the essential part of building and nurturing the society. Therefore, for the needs for survival, enjoyment and to support others in the society, the house-holders need to perform actions for the acquisition of resources and their distribution. By action alone, they are able to sustain the wellbeing of themselves and others. On the contrary, there are those who take-up a life-style of renunciation with the focus on spiritual progress only; so they minimize and avoid dependance on worldly objects; their life-style is **nivṛiti-nisthā**, with predominant focus on the knowledge for liberation. So, yes, Bhagavān talks about '**grahasta-āshrama**' and '**sanyāsa-āshrama**' as the two distinct life-styles for the human-beings."

Aiya immediately added.

"Do not wrongly infer that house-holder does not seek knowledge and also as those who take up renunciation perform no action! Here only the predominant focus of each life-style is emphasised."

"Aiya, Is the choice of life-style fixed? When and how one chooses the life-style?"

“Bhagavān will explain this to us. Taking the life of renunciation the ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’ is advocated only for those who have attained the necessary mental and intellectual maturity. Therefore ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’ is deemed as the fourth and the last-stage of human-life.”

“Fourth stage? I thought we are only talking about two life styles!”

“Yes, There are only two ‘life-styles’ as said earlier. But there are four ‘life-stages’. The ‘family-life’ or ‘grahasta-āshrama’, is the life-stage where one should follow the life-style ‘**pravṛiti-niṣṭhā**’ and therefore predominant focus is performing actions. In the life-stage of ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’, one should take up the life-style of ‘**nivṛiti-niṣṭhā**’ with the predominant focus on knowledge.”

“What are the other two life-stages, Aiya?”

“Of the other two, one is before ‘grahasta-āshrama’, and the other after ‘grahasta-āshrama’. Thus there are 4 life-stages or āshrama.”

I was listening.

“The other two are to be taken as ‘preparatory stages’. The ‘**Brahmacharya-āshrama**’ is the first life-stage. It refers to the formative years of acquiring skills and knowledge to equip one to lead righteous life. A formal initiation is advocated to mark that a child is entering to this first stage of progress in life. This initiation is so important in ‘Sanātana-Dharma’ and it considers as if giving a rebirth to the child. The teachers, as the new ‘parents’ take the ownership for nurturing the child and imparting all necessary life-skills and knowledge, preparing the child to ably understand and decide on the how to handle subsequent stages of life.”

“What is the third one Aiya?”

“Third one is ‘**vānaprastha-āshrama**’ which follows the family-life; you can consider as the early part of your retirement from world-affairs and this stage is the transition stage of the house-holder to prepare and enter the fourth stage of ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’. All these we will learn soon. Since ‘grahasta-āshrama’, is prescribed as an earlier life-stage than the ‘sanyāsa-āshrama”, clearly, change of life-style from **pravṛiti niṣṭhā**’ to ‘**nivṛiti niṣṭhā**’ is possible; but ‘**nivṛiti niṣṭhā**’ to ‘**pravṛiti niṣṭhā**’ is not expected.”

“In other words Aiya, only after being a house-holder, one can become the renounced?”

“In general yes, there may be exceptions as we have seen some going directly from ‘Brahmacharya-āshrama’ to ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’, like Bhagavān Ramana. Those conditions are different and we will learn those in due course. Here the important point is there are two distinct life-style and respectively different paths.”

“Sure Aiya, when Bhagavān says the Discipline of Action, He means Karma-Yōga right?”

“Yes, you have asked me earlier - ‘what Yōga should I do?’. Bhagavān has clearly instructed that as a house-holder, your paramount pursuit is Karma-Yōga. Let us use the phrase Discipline of Action hereinafter, as there are discipline in how one performs action to be deemed as done in Karma-Yōga. The Discipline of Action leads to the Jñāna-Yōga, the Discipline of Knowledge.”

“Aiya, does it mean, without taking up the ‘sanyāsa-āshrama’, one cannot pursue the Discipline of Knowledge for the ‘Ātma-jnāam’! That means, there is no liberation for a house-holder! That sounds unfair!”

Aiya laughed.

“It is a good question. The demarcation of ‘life-style’ is only a ‘guideline’. The Discipline of Knowledge, ‘Jñāna-Yōga’, can be pursued even while remaining as the house-holder. The Discipline of Action, ‘Karma-Yōga’ is mandated for the house-holders. By performing Karma-Yōga, one attains the required maturity and mental purity to increase their focus on the pursuit of ‘Ātma-jnāam’. So, no, there is no need to change the life-style as the very essence of Karma-Yōga will make you as a person of true renunciation. Life-style does not matter, only the adherence to the disciplines matter.”

“Aiya, is there not a contradiction?”

“No. It will become clear to us once Bhagavān explains the true value of Karma-Yōga. In performing Karma-Yōga, the Karma-Yōgi has already given-up all benefits of action, and therefore renunciation has become his nature. So even as a house-holder, he is a ‘sanyāsi’. This will come clear soon. The important lesson is that without performing actions as Karma-Yōga, one cannot attain the

maturity needed for the spiritual progress.”

na karmaṇāmanārambhānnaiśkarmyam puruṣo'snute
na ca samnyasanādeva siddhim samadhigacchati (3.4)

“Not by abstaining from action does a person attains freedom from the bondage, nor by mere renunciation does he attain perfection. (3.4)”

“Bhagavān now tells the importance of doing action. If Arjuna takes the term ‘liberation’ to mean ‘not doing any action’, then he has misunderstood. ‘Free from action’ only refers to the ‘freedom from the impact’ of action. This is emphasised by Bhagavān with two assertions. First, by abstaining from action that ought to be done, one does not get freedom. If one thinks not doing action is the life of renunciation, that is also a wrong notion; one does not attain perfection by such failures to perform.”

“Aiya, so action is necessary for both life-styles, is that the meaning?”

“ Yes giving up action does not lead to liberation. Inaction is not admitted in both life-styles. It is also impossible for anyone to totally give up action.”

na hi kaścitkṣaṇamapi jātu tiṣṭhatyakarmakṛt
kāryate hyavaśaḥ karma sarvah prakṛtijairguṇaiḥ (3.5)

“None, verily, even for an instant, ever remains doing no action ; for everyone is driven helpless to action by the energies barn of Nature. (3.5)”

“Bhagavān gives a great insight here. Everything in the world is forever performing some action. This is because of the inherent nature of things.”

“Even while sleeping, Aiya?”, I asked.

“Yes, action is always going on within you even when you sleep. This is because how all beings are made. Individual nature is moulded by tendencies; the tendencies are born of modes; Remember the ‘**traiguna**’- the three modalities of nature - the cause of which is ‘**prakrti**’.”

“What is ‘prakrti’”

“For now, consider the term to refer the ‘eternal nature’; it is the root cause of

all that appears in names and forms as the ever changing worlds of objects. The individual nature is therefore made up of the same fundamental modalities of nature. After all, every effect is only the modification of its cause, is it not?”

Aiya continued.

“That is why perpetual action is in our nature. No one can be action-less even for a moment.”

“Aiya, what about when I don’t do any physical activity?”

“Your physical body continues to be active. Every cell of your body is active, at all time. But if you only consider your external activities, even when those are stopped, your mind is active. Action is the very nature of existence. No one can eliminate actions; therefore our choice is how we should regulate actions. That is what we should learn.”

“So what is renunciation of action mean?”

“Great question! Renunciation of action is not giving up the action, but giving up the fruits of action. Every selfless action is to be deemed as action done in renunciation. Such actions do not bind.”

“Aiya, when I perform meditation, where I control my senses, am I considered action-less?”

karmendriyāṇi saṃyamya ya āste manasā smaran
indriyārthaṇvīmūḍhātmā mithyācāraḥ sa ucyate (3.6)

“He who, restraining the organs of action, sits thinking in his mind of the objects of the senses, self-deluded, he is said to be one of false conduct. (3.6)”

“Bhagavān now talks about the danger of vehemently suppressing the sense organs with the view that such a state of ‘inaction’ is meditative. If your approach is alike, then you are deluded too. Bhagavān strongly condemns such acts as bogus renunciation and those who pretend such acts as renunciation as ‘**mityācāra**’. Please understand, without a purpose, if you simply try to remain action-less, your mind is not directed; it then becomes a fertile ground for weeds of thought that distract; that would be wasted life, making a deep fall from progress. That is dangerous.”

“Aiya, so inaction does not give liberation, inaction is impossible; forcefully trying to remain as action-less is also dangerous. All these are said by Bhagavān only to highlight the importance of doing action, right?”

“Yes! Inaction is impossible. But imposing discipline in action is possible and essential. Everyone should unfailingly perform due actions with certain discipline. Therefore one should not struggle to remain action less; For the house-holder, this is a bonus: the path of action is natural as it is insuppressible and our inherent tendency is to act. Thee only requirement is to bring in the discipline so that the house-holder can easily progress to Karma-Yōga , the Discipline of Action. The house-holder thus performs action to serves the family and the society and at the same time attains the clarity of mind and resolute intellect, the essential qualities to pursue Ātma-jñānam. Such person is the most honourable.”

yastvindriyāṇī manasā niyamyārabhate'rjuna
karmendriyaiḥ karmaYōgamasaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate (3.7)

“But whoso, restraining the senses by mind o Arjuna, engages in Karma-Yōga, unattached with organs of action, he is esteemed. (3.7)”

“Aiya, Who is esteemed?”

“Bhagavān says those who perform the actions diligently as Karma-Yōga are the esteemed. A Karma-Yōgi may not look outwardly different to a ‘**Karmi**’ (one does action not as a Karma-Yōga). It is because while the organs of actions are focused on what needs to be accomplished, inwardly, the Karma -Yōgi is distinguished as his senses are regulated and his mind refrained from the impulses. They are indeed the esteemed.”

“Aiya, for the house-holder, what is Karma-Yōga? How do the activities performed as Karma-Yōga differ from others?”

“The word ‘Karma’ refers to ‘actions’ and the second word ‘Yōga’ refers to ‘certain attitude’ so that together the term refers to ‘proper action’ executed in ‘proper’ way. One who performs accordingly is called ‘Karma-Yōgi’, in contrast others are ‘Karmi’. Scriptures describe various types of Karma and their applicabilities to one’s life, based on one’s life-style and life-stage.”

“Aiya, please explain what you mean by types of Karma?”

“Scriptures classifies Karma in yet another way for our comprehension by the nature of underlying ‘**guna**’, the modalities of nature.”

“Aiya, the three guna are what we saw before?”

“Yes, based on those ‘**traiguna**’, the Karma are grouped into three. ‘**Sātvic-Karma**’ are divine actions that are performed for the benefit of others; those are done for the benefit of more people. Karma-Yōgi should always endeavour to perform only ‘Sātvic-Karma’.”

Aiya continued.

“Then there are actions that one may do, only with the sole intention of meeting one’s own needs. Actions done entirely for ‘selfish-reasons’ are termed as ‘**Rājasic-Karma**’. Do you understand?”

“Aiya, many of our actions are to meet our personal or family needs. How can we deny those actions?”

“Denial is not suggested; only a control is advocated! Actions done only for self benefits or only for the needs of one’s own family are ‘Rājasic-Karma’ . I agree, ordinarily, the ‘Rājasic-Karma’ form the largest part of our actions. But that does not make ‘those’ as the norm. We should always aim to change our actions to become ‘Sātvic’ in nature. To do this, we need to regulate and minimize the share of ‘Rājasic-Karma’ in our lives.”

“I guess the third type of Karma is ‘**Tāmasic-Karma**’, right”?

“Yes, actions that are done solely to cause adverse impact on others, sometime not even for any supplementary personal gains, are ‘**Tāmasic-Karma**’; Such evil actions should be totally discarded. So it is important to think carefully before taking up an action and consider what type it is. We all have complete freewill to action - either to do or not do, either to do this way or that way. We should make use of that privilege before embarking. We must deliberate and discard ‘Tāmasic-Karma’; also regulate or minimize ‘Rājasic-Karma’ giving preference only to the ‘Sātvic-Karma’. This is the foremost requirement for Karma-Yoga and so Bhagavān asks us to happily engage in action.”

niyatam kuru karma tvam karma jyāyo hyakarmaṇah
śarīrayatrāpi ca te na prasiddhyedakarmaṇah (3.8)

“(Therefore), Do perform your mandated duties because action is superior to inaction, and by inaction, even sustenance of the body would not be possible for you. (3.8)”

“Bhagavān now talks about Karma-Yōga starting with the ‘commandment’: we must do our duties, the mandated actions. Bhagavān says ‘**tvam niyatam karma kuru**’ - telling Arjuna, ‘you do the mandated duties’. He thus gives another definition for Karma-Yōga as the performance of mandated duties.”

“Aiya, what are these mandated actions?”

“Let us first understand what triggers the action in us. Firstly, there are sensory impulses and emotions that drive us to action. Such actions are born out of ‘likes and dislikes’ - ‘**raga-dvesha janyam**’. Then there are actions taken upon the considered endorsement by our resolute intellect; those are something we commit to do: ‘**kartavya buddhi janyam**’ - ‘born out of intellect’, do you follow? ”.

“May I ask for some examples?”

“You like to see a movie and therefore you go to a movie. That is an example of action born out of your desire for sensual pleasures. Your likes and dislikes drive such actions. Say, you have to get up at certain time in the morning to go to work and this is something that you have committed to reasons, even though you like to sleep for more time. That is not impulse driven, but a reasoned mandate driven. Do you see the difference?”

“Understood Aiya”

“We need to do what is mandated duties. Others, we need to be careful before taking up for execution because those actions could fall into list of ‘prohibited action’ or ‘**Nishiddha-Karma**’ by the scriptures. Scriptures prescribe what Karma to be done and what not to be done.”

“Aiya, please explain. On what basis scriptures assign Karma to all? How some actions are declared as prohibited? Also how could scriptures enumerate as there are so many actions that we all need to do in the world?”

“Scriptures are our guidance in life. Language provides the letters and the rules of making words. We then make words, sentences and even write great epics - all based on the building blocks of the language and its rules. Simil-

larly the scriptures address the varied needs of human-beings by providing certain rules, all based on dharma. We may do many tasks in our lives, but all our actions can be grouped into certain types and this is what the scriptures do. These are broadly split into two: '*Vihita-Karma*' which are to be necessarily done and '*Nishiddha-Karma*' which are to be necessarily avoided. These are based on Dharma - the righteousness. We have already learnt about '*Sāmānya-Dharma*', the 'common human values' such as not stealing, not hurting, not speaking untruth etc. We also saw about '*Visesha-Dharma*' which are applicable only to certain people and also at certain life-stages. Thus, each of us inherit certain values, disciplines, role and corresponding responsibilities appropriate to our-life stages. This is denoted by '*svadharma*'. Scriptures indicate the duties implied by one's '*svadharma*' as the 'mandated duties'. Not doing those amounts to sin."

"Nishiddha-Karma is?"

"Dictated by the Dharma, and also by one's '*svadharma*', certain actions are deemed inappropriate and so deemed as 'prohibited'; those should never be done."

"Aiya, like 'stealing others property' etc. Right?"

"Well, such acts are surely to be avoided. Frankly, we don't need the scriptures to instruct on those evil acts. Our common sense itself will guide us. But the importance here is that there are certain actions which may not be evil but could be regressive and harming one's progress in life. We are always tempted to try and do such enticing acts, such as gambling, drinking intoxicated drinks etc. Scriptures, and those knowledgeable in interpreting the scriptural texts, help us in avoiding those prohibited actions."

Aiya continued.

"Sometimes we may have to do certain actions even though it is not a mandated action by the scriptures, but endorsed by our resolute intellect that those should be done, even though those actions are not coming out of desires."

"Like the instruction from my Doctor that I must do physical exercise every-day... which I don't enjoy", I said with a tone of guilt.

Laughingly Aiya said, "Yes, such necessary actions even though not triggered by personal desires are called '*Nishkāma-Karma*'. Those are to be done similar to

the mandated duties.”

“Ok Aiya! What about other actions driven by our personal desires? For example, going to movies, enjoying travel, buying goods for pleasures - are these actions allowed? If not, how does one enjoy life?”

“Of course you can perform actions to achieve those objects of desire and pleasure; part of embodied life is to enjoy. Only condition is that those actions should not fall into prohibited list of acts. Scriptures call actions that are driven by desires as ‘*Kāmya-Karma*’ or ‘*Sakāma-Karma*’. Remember, our actions that are seeking things and experiences which are not for the basic survival and safety needs, then those actions fall under ‘*Sakāma-Karma*’.”

“So we can do those?”

“Only if those are not falling into the list of prohibited acts or ‘Nishiddha-Karma’. The good news is that when you perform all actions as Karma-Yoga, then the Kāmya-Karma will eventually leave.”

“Is there any other type of Karma?”

“One more - which the scriptures call as ‘*Prāyaschita-Karma*’. These refer to ‘remedial actions’, as a compromise or an adjustment to compensate our failures in adherence.”

“That is, if we have done something wrong and we like to make corrections to escape from the impact, right?”

“Yes, for the past-mistakes of doing something wrong, or not doing what needed to be done, one may look for remedial actions so that the implications could be moderated or avoided. Such ‘remedial actions’ are given in the scriptures in the form of certain rituals or sacrifices.”

“Are those mandated by the scriptures?”

“No! Those are not mandated; but one may desire to do in order to avoid any negative impact of past actions. Doing ‘*Prāyaschita-Karma*’ only for escaping from adversities must be generally avoided, as it would mean, losing the opportunities to develop the strength to face up life; taking remedial actions weaken our resolve. So such Karma should be done only, selectively and rarely. Ideally

those should be done only if such remedial actions will help others. If it is done for personal interest, their applications should be minimized.”

Aiya continued.

“Bhagavān used the term ‘**niyatam**’ to indicate both the day-to-day mandated duties, ‘**nitya-karma**’ and the specially mandated duties, such as for the birth of a child, death of a relative, marriage rituals etc., ‘**naimittika-karma**’. We know these from the tradition and also by the learned teachers of scriptures. One should always do such mandated actions, as Karma-Yoga.”

“Why Aiya?”

yajñārthātkarmanōnyatra lōkoyam karmabandhanah
tadarthaṁ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgah samācara (3.9)

“The human-beings are bound by actions except in the case of action for the sake of sacrifices (yajñā); So, O son of Kunti, perform for that (yajñā) sake, free from attachment. (3.9)”

“Aiya, is Bhagavān talking about ‘**Yajñā**’, fire-rituals?”

“Having started the description of Karma-Yoga with the commandment, now Bhagavān describes it in terms of **Yajñā** which refers to virtuous actions that are done as sacrifice. The ‘Fire-ritual’ that you have mentioned is a type of ‘**Yajñā**’ by which oblation to ‘gods’, the powers of nature are made in gratitude and also for obtaining benefits for one and all. There are many types of ‘**Yajñā**’ in the Scriptures. But here Bhagavān is bringing the important aspect of Karma-Yoga for which we should take the intended meaning of the term ‘**Yajñā**’. It is about treating the life itself as a performance of sacrifices for the common good. When we consciously conduct our life as a series of endeavours, each done as a sacrifice, our life is enriched in Karma-Yoga. As house-holders, we have the most important role and opportunity in this.”

“What are the duties for the house-holder Aiya?”

“Bhagavān here quotes the two most important duties of house-holders: ‘**Ya-jñam**’, and ‘**dhānam**’. Bhagavān will also add later, ‘**tapas**’ as the important duty for the house-holder at particular stage of life for progress. Performance of ‘**Ya-jñam**’ requires setting up and beseeching a higher ideal and in this process or-

ganize and distribute resources, offer oblations and distribute rewards to others - all in all, to serve, share and sacrifice. The word ‘*dhānam*’ refers to the supreme act of willingly and unconditionally giving away even things that are dear to one for the sake of others. The very definition of these duties require those to be done as Karma-Yoga, those actions are not binding but leading to liberation. Thus, having talked about the nature and types of Karma, now Bhagavān talks about the attitude required to perform the action as Karma-Yoga. The attitude marks the shift for an action to become non-binding in stead of binding. The attitude is about being unattached to the outcome of the action. It is giving up the expectation or right on the outcome.”

“How Aiya?”

“Karma-Yoga is all about doing the right actions in right attitude. We have seen what the right actions are. Those are the ‘Vihita-Karma’ and ‘Nishkāma-Karma’ only; moderated and regulated ‘Sakāma-Karma’ and occasional ‘prāyascita-Karma’ are accepted, knowing that these will fall away as progress in Karma-Yoga. Now we must understand what is the right attitude to perform actions, in order to be valid as Karma-Yoga.”

“Aiya, without expectation of any outcome, one should do the duty. Is that correct? I understand the importance of such attitude, but how do we instil such an approach? Is it possible at all?”

“Well, It is all in the attitude of our minds. Consider an example: When the action required is to pay-off the final repayment due on a loan, one gets a sort of fulfilment when completing that act itself, as there is nothing more expected upon the settlement, do you see the point! That settlement action itself completes and there is no expectation beyond. Try to perform every action in the same approach: as a debt to be cleared or an onus to be fulfilled and the successful completion of action itself serves as the final outcome. Then your attitude moves towards Karma-Yoga.”

“So we give up the right, just take up the duty! Is that simple?”

“Rights will come on their own. Just do what needs to be done to the best of your abilities and with interest in doing it well - as if completing the debt for good.”

“Aiya, if I just do my duty, what is the guarantee that my rights will come? What if those due to me do not come?”

“Well, if you drop the expectation, you will not have the query. But your question is understandable. That is why Bhagavān is giving the assurance. That is why Bhagavān is asking us to perform actions are done in the name of God. The term ***Yajñā*** is used by Bhagavān. The literal meaning is the rituals of sacrifice. But the intended meaning here is '***Ishvara***', because Vedas declare '***yajñovai vishnuh:***'. Therefore the teaching is: ‘Treat the work as the worship’, as an offering to God, '***Ishvara-arpanam***'. Here Bhagavān is giving the first part: What should be our attitude in performing an action.”

“Aiya, this means Karma-Yōgi should be a devotee, right?”

“Yes!”

Aiya quickly added.

“Well, you can consider two different attitude towards God. In one, ‘God is the master and I am His eternal servant’. That means: ‘I must completely follow the words of my Master, which is the Veda. So I do my mandated duties as per the scriptures’. This is one approach, straightforward, driven by the devotion to God.”

I was listening.

“There are others who may like to look God, not as the controlling Master but the enabler. This is also fine. It is because one could at least reason out based on the common human value: gratitude. Just think about life. Everything is given to us by God, everything is enabled by God. Starting from the prize of human-birth, this body, the parents, friends and all other things in life are coming to us without our efforts. All our efforts and actions are only in the manipulation of what we are endowed with. Thus we must be totally indebted to the supreme power for being our enabler. So we must be grateful and only in that attitude we must perform our actions as oblation to God. Bhagavān asks us to perform without attachment '***muktasaṅgah***'. When you have dispassion and detachment in action it does not mean that you are resentful or reluctant in doing the action; on the contrary your interest is immense and the focus deep as said by Bhagavān with the word, '***samācara***'. This is very important. This vital point must be grasped.”

“Understood Aiya. When we do for God, then we offer the best possible. That is bonus.”

“Very true. That is why Bhagavān introduces the importance of devotion. The Discipline of Devotion or ‘*Bhakti-Yōga*’ will be discussed in due course. Here Bhagavān has indicated how devotion to God forms the rock solid foundation for the pursuit of Karma-Yōga, the Discipline of Action. The same is true for the Jñāna-Yōga, the Discipline of Knowledge. Devotion to God needs to be the underlying foundation.”

“Aiya, how are these paths differ?”

“Do not consider these as separate and distinct paths somehow leading to the same destination. Many take up such an approach and consider Action, Devotion, Knowledge are all independent means to liberation. No! The pursuit and attainment are only at the mercy of God and therefore devotion to the supreme power is necessary. When there is devotion to God, then there is accommodation for the need to surrender and sacrifice. This enables to the pursue Karma-Yoga. The benefit of Karma-Yoga is the purity of mind and resolute intellect, built on dispassion to all that are ‘perishable’ or ‘*kshara*’. Such a mind is capable of applying the discrimination to seek out that which is ‘imperishable’ or ‘*akshara*’ as the supreme ‘Self’. This is the path of knowledge, the Jñāna-Yoga. The underlying devotion to God, the One beyond all perishable and imperishable then grants the absolute realization of the non-dual eternal ever blissful existence in none other than the Self. Therefore consider all these are not distinct paths but mutually inclusive and dependant, with one leading to the other.”

sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatiḥ
anena prasaviṣyadhvameṣa vo’stvīṣṭakāmadhuk (3.10)

“In the beginning of creation, through sacrifice, Prajapati created humankind along with duties, and said, “Prosper in the performance of these yajñas (sacrifices), for they shall bestow upon you all you wish to achieve.’ (3.10)”

“Bhagavān now reinforces the earlier command for performing Karma-Yoga, by stating how the Creator has ordained in creations. By performing the sacrifice, the Lord Brahma created the world and the mankind, endowing with the duty of sacrifice for their well being. Action in the spirit of sacrifice is therefore the inherent onus to mankind. Embodied beings are ‘*Bhōgātma*’ - born to enjoy or experience the embodiment. The world of objects exist for this purpose only and therefore there exists the mandate to nourish and mutually support the giver, the nature, and the consumer, the beings. The human-beings as the most advanced form of embodiment in this world therefore carry the most advanced

form of indebtedness to nature. This is what is told to Arjuna. Here the term '*yajñāḥ*' is used to refer the 'life-style of sacrifice' for the Karma-Yōgi. You must understand that sacrifice is possible only for human-beings. Sacrifice is the most important value, especially for the house-holder and many mandatory Karma are based on sacrifice. Here the supreme value of 'sacrifice' is indicated as the inherent nature for human-beings."

"Aiya - if sacrifice is an inherent nature for human-beings, why is it not evident?"

"That is the great question. Loyalty is an inherent nature for dogs; that is why they wag their tail instinctively. Such instinctively recognizable quality, variably exist in each type of being. Our nature is to love, being grateful, compassionate etc. However, our infinite capacity of 'mind' is marred with the stock of impurities, causing us to be unaware of our true nature. But it is not always the case! Be in the look out, the virtue of sacrifice always shines through in every human being, sometime or the other."

"Aiya, can you please tell me what are the sacrifices that we should consciously do as our mandated duties?"

"For the house-holders, only to remind the importance of selfless action, and the inherent spirit of sacrifice, the scriptures give '*panca-mahā-yajñāḥ*' or the 'five-great-sacrifices' as the mandated duties. You must have known those and you may be already doing those in one form or the other."

I was listening.

"The first one is '*Deva-yajñāḥ*', performed everyday in the form of prayers to God. Our prayer may be for some desire that we seek, or offering gratitude for some desires fulfilled or simply surrendering and hailing the supreme glory of God. In whatever form, prayer at the starting and ending the day is mandated and of course, the scale of such prayers may vary across different stages of our life. The important point is one should be sincere both in terms of daily adherence and intense commitment in offering the prayers. In fact, such sincerity and commitment should be applied to all out actions."

"What is the second one Aiya?"

"Second one is to the reverential recollection and offering to one's ancestors, known as '*Pitru-yajñāḥ*'. The embodiment is progressive gift of the lineage; so

showing gratitude to ancestors by rejoicing their memories and oblations and prayers on their behalf are mandated.”

“Third one is ‘*Rishi-yajñāḥ*’. Great many Sages as the Seers of the Truth have given us knowledge, steering us towards perfection. We all owe to their sacrifices. This unpayable debt is known as ‘*Rishirinam*’. The way to show gratitude is to study scriptures and related spiritual texts and also propagate their glory. That is why as part of the mandated duty, we have to read, hear and impart the scriptural texts everyday. We all may not be qualified to impart knowledge to others, but we all must study without fail, everyday at least some part to progressively learn the import of the scriptures.”

Aiya continued.

“The fourth sacrifice is ‘*Manushya-yajñāḥ*’, which is about offering service to other human-beings without discrimination. Actively one must seek to welcome and support others, with kind and comforting words and offer all possible support as needed. The last one is ‘*Bhuta-yajñāḥ*’ which refers to feeding other beings, animals, birds, insects and plants. These sacrifices are mandated to the house-holders, to be done daily, without fail and without expectations. That would orient one’s life towards Karma-Yoga.”

devānbhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vah
parasparam bhāvayantah śreyah paramavāpsyatha (3.11)

“With this may you gratify the Gods, and the Gods shall nourish you; thus nourishing one another, ye shall attain the supreme good. (3.11)”

iṣṭānbhogānhi vo devā dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ
tairdattānapradāyaibhyo yo bhunkte stena eva saḥ (3.12)

“Nourished by the sacrifice, the Gods shall indeed bestow on you the enjoyments you desire. Whoso enjoys Their gifts, without offering to Them, he is verily a thief. (3.12)”

“Bhagavān is giving another definition of ‘Dharma’ here. ‘*dharma rakshati rakshitaḥ*:’ which implies dharma is ‘that which protects the protector’. Being grateful to all that the gods give in the nature, we must worship the gods, the powers of nature with offerings to the best of our abilities and with at most sincerity. In return, the gods nourish us by giving all that is needed in the nature to sustain

and enjoy life in this world. Such harmony with nature should be ensured by our conduct.”

“Aiya, how is that our offerings to God help us in progressing with Karma-Yōga?”

“Bhagavān is imparting the second important attitude needed for Karma-Yōga. That is the ‘*prashāda-bhuddi*’ the attitude to receive all as the ‘gift of God’. This would mean, everything we face in life, grief or joy, is the gift of God and therefore to be treated with reverence. This attitude helps us to accept any situation. Acceptance helps us to avoid grief and fill with endurance. Resistance fuels sorrow and weakens us.”

“As everything is given in the nature, all our accomplishments must be offered to God. Bhagavān now talks about ‘dhānam’, the sharing of our earnings with others. Offering to God is both in gratitude and in our duty to share. If one does nor share one’s earnings through sacrifice, then one is said to be a thief. Since all our efforts and so called ‘earnings’ are only taking what is already in the nature through our manipulations in the form of actions, we always owe our earnings to others. Therefore sharing with others and sacrifices are mandated, failing which we becomes thieves of nature. The positive benefit of sharing and sacrifices mean, the actions that we do become nonbinding in nature, which is the aim and necessary goal for liberation.”

*yajñaśiṣṭāśinah santo mucyante sarvakilbiṣaiḥ
bhuñjate te tvagham pāpā ye pacantyātmakāraṇāt (3.13)*

“The righteous, who eat the remnant of the sacrifice, are freed from all sins; but those who cook for their own sakes verily devour sin. (3.13)”

“By offering to others first, such as the five-fold Yajña for the house-holders, one attains virtue and eventually freed from all sins. On the contrary, those who only acts for their own sake, without offering to others, verily commit sin. It means, those sinners are deprived of understanding and the path to liberation and thus its pursuits.”

“Aiya, what does Bhagavān mean by saying ‘freedom from sin’? What sins that the house-holder of righteous life could possibly commit!”

“Well, even without knowing, we may cause hindrances to others in our day to day life. We may step on many insects without knowing! A house-holder may in-

advertently cause violence to insects by the acts of smashing, grinding, burning, cleaning etc. in the normal house hold activities, according to the enumerations in the Manu-Smriti. Even from such inadvertent sins, one gets relief when the acts are done in Karma-Yoga. Such righteous conduct in life at individual level translates in to the great service to the whole world, helping in its perpetual motion in the path of Dharma. That is because there is mutual dependency for the wheel of world to move properly for the well being of all.”

annādbhavanti bhūtāni parjanyādannasambhavaḥ
yajñādbhavati parjanyo yajñāḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ (3.14)

karma brahmodbhavaṁ viddhi brahmākṣarasamudbhavam
tasmātsarvagataṁ brahma nityaṁ yajñe pratiṣṭhitam (3.15)

“From food creatures come forth; the production of food is from rain; rain comes forth from sacrifice and the sacrifice is born of action; know that the action has the origin in the Veda and the Veda comes from the Imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading Brahman ever rests in sacrifice. (3.14, 3.15)”

“Aiya, I am not clear. Is Bhagavān talking about mutual dependency in the world?”

“Bhagavān is emphasising the importance of Karma-Yoga which is based on performing action with the attitude of sacrifice. That is how the whole creation is set in motion. **‘Anna’** means food, the cause of all bodies. Every being comes out of food, by eating food all creatures survive and eaten by food, all creatures eventually turn to food. Food requires water; we need rain to give water and to get rains, we need to perform sacrifices.”

“Aiya, Is not rain a natural phenomena? How do we relate the arrival of rain to the act of sacrifices by human beings?”

“Rain should come at appropriate time, at appropriate measures for generating and sustaining the food-chain for our lives. Nature has to be merciful in orchestrating so many factors for the rain. Scriptures say that the gods will protect the land where there is selfless act of kindness. This is indicated by an interesting anecdote in the **‘Brahadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad’**. The Creator while creating the beings gave them the sound of ‘d’ to remind them of their duties to sustain ‘Dharma’. The human-beings who inherently like hoarding, took the sound ‘d’ to mean **‘Dāna’**, giving charitably. The gods, the divine-beings, because of their

luxuriant pleasures took it as ‘**Damana**’ or ‘self-control’ and the Demons who are violent in nature took it as ‘**Daya**’ or mercy. Therefore the thundering rain-cloud roars with the sound of ‘D D D’ and this anecdote brings to our attention that our acts should be with charity, self-control and kindness.”

“Interesting Aiya! But how does our performance of action bring timely rain?”

“We have to take the words of Bhagavān for that. He has already told that when we offer to gods, in turn, the gods need to perform their duty to nourish the world. The farmer may see no rain yet, when driven by the attitude of sacrifice, as he ploughs the land, the peacocks see his plights and they make their calls. Hearing their calls, Indra, the Lord of Deva, summon the Rain-god to shower. Such is an anecdote reinforcing the same assertion. Only for this, scriptures prescribe Karma that bring out our act of charity, self-control and kindness. Those are Yajña.”

Aiya continued.

“So our action according to the Vedas performed brings the mercy of gods for our welfare. Bhagavān uses the term ‘**Brahma**’ for the Vedas and states that the Vedas come from the Imperishable Brahman. Therefore the chain of sacrifices is what makes the working of the world.”

“Aiya, Are not the Vedas given by the Seers?”

“Seers are those blessed-Sages who are able to discover what is already present as knowledge in the nature. Seers only discover, understand and propagate their findings. Newtons’ Laws are not the creations of Newton! Those were his discoveries of what are already existing in the Nature. Vedas are revealed knowledge and that is why called as ‘**apauruṣeya**’ revered as the words of the Lord and therefore not subjected to the blemishes of human mind. Therefore Vedas should be the primary and the overriding source of knowledge for all.”

“Aiya, what happens if one does not follow such discipline?”

evam pravartitam cakram nānuvartayatīha yaḥ
aghāyurindriyārāmo mogham pārtha sa jīvati (3.16)

“One who does not follow the wheel thus set in motion (in Dharma), makes one’s life sinful, indulging in senses and wasted in vain, O Partha. (3.16)”

“Bhagavān uses the phrase ‘**cakram**’ or ‘wheel’ to indicate the cycle of mutual dependence. It is the ‘wheel of the world’ that is set in motion in the path of ‘Dharma’ and we all have the responsibilities to ensure its perpetual sojourn. Performing our duties as Karma-Yōga is therefore mandated to all human-beings. If one does not contribute to this universal requirement, then one is condemned with one’s life deemed as sinful! It is because in the absence of Karma-Yōga, actions will be only for sensual pleasures and thus one’s life will be wasted away without securing the virtues needed to progress towards eternal freedom. Bhagavān uses the word ‘**mogham**’ to indicate useless’ or ‘wasteful’ nature of life. You must know the word ‘**moham**’ on the other hand refers to ‘delusion’. Deluded mind leads to useless action and wasteful life.”

“Understood Aiya.”

“Thus Bhagavān completes the instruction on Karma-Yōga. You should by now have the good understanding of Karma-Yōga.”

“I think so Aiya. Karma-Yōga is about doing only what is right, and doing those with the right attitude. Correct?”

“Yes, How do you know what is ‘right’?”

“Right actions are those that are mandated according to my ‘**svadharma**’. Right actions are those that are not ‘prohibited’ in the scriptures.”

“What is ‘right attitude’ for doing the action?”

“Before doing the action, I should fully analyse the action and the way that I plan to do are both righteous, and”, I hesitated.

“Then?”

“I must perform the action with utmost care and interest as if I am offering as worship to God. Action should be done for ‘God-sake’ or as ‘**Ishvara-arpanam**’. Work should be revered as worship. I must do so with keen interest only for its timely completion to the best of my abilities.”

“Then?”

“That is it. I must discharge alike every task, and as if I am paying off my final

instalment of a debt. Therefore there is no expectation on the outcome. Satisfaction must be in the completion of task itself.”

“Then what attitude should you have for the outcome of the action?”

“Accepting as ‘*Ishvara-Prashād*’ - no matter what comes, gracefully taking it.”

“Do you understand why you have to accept as ‘Ishvara-Prashād’?”

“Yes Aiya. When Arjuna fires the arrow, there ends his power of action. He has the choice to fight, set the target, lock the bow and fire. But once the arrow has left, then its trajectory may change due to so many things in the nature. So the end-result cannot be owned by Arjuna. Everything we do is also like that. We merely perform our part and then leave it for the God to take it over. That is why the outcome of any action should be taken as the ‘gift of God’. Am I right Aiya?”

“Indeed ! Are you therefore committing to the required ‘dispassion’ to the ‘fruit of labour’ while doing actions?”

“I will work hard on this. I am still far away to shun all actions driven by personal desires. But now I know, even though I perform such ‘*sakāma-karma*’, I can regulate those and eventually shed those at some stage.”

“Hold on to those resolute intellect. That is necessary. Now Bhagavān starts new topic - *Mōksha*.”

“Aiya, while talking about duty, why Bhagavān suddenly talks about Mōksha?”

“The reason is, Bhagavān wants to tell us that performing Karma-Yōga must continue until one attains liberation. The Karma-Yōgi will eventually attain a supreme mental state and only then he has the freedom to give up all actions. Remember Karma-Yōga is not the end but the most essential means to the end, the Liberation. The state of mind required for pursuing the knowledge for liberation results only by performing Karma-Yōga. With the description, and the conduct, of the Liberated, Bhagavān summarizes the Karma-Yōga.”

§ Conduct of the Liberated

yastvātmaratireva syādātmatrptaśca mānavaḥ
ātmanyeva ca santuṣṭastasya kāryam na vidyate (3.17)

“That person, who rejoices in the Self alone, who is fulfilled with the Self and who is well contented in the Self alone, for that person, there is nothing to be done. (3.17)”

“Aiya, Bhagavān quotes the terms ‘rejoice’, ‘fulfilled’ and ‘contented’. Are all these conveying the same?”

“Good question. Bhagavān narrates the state of mind of such liberated soul. The term ‘*rathihi*’ refers to ‘pleasure in objects’. This is called ‘*bhoga-sukham*’ or ‘*vishaya-ānanda*’. For the Karma-Yōgi, the ‘*vishaya*’ or desired ‘object’ is the ‘Self’ only and therefore he is rejoicing within self. Thus he is also ‘internally’ happy, requiring no external objects for joy. Only when you are happy within you, and only when you are able to love yourself, you are able to give happiness and love to others. This is the first point of the state of mind of Karma-Yōgi.”

Aiya continued.

“Also Karma-Yōgi is not impacted by external events. In other words, Karma-Yōgi does not find fault in others and is full of ‘*sandhusti*’ or contentment. These three: contentment, fulfilment and internal joy are all indicating ‘blissful existence’, the ‘*Ātma-ānanda*’.”

naiva tasya kṛtenārtho nākṛteneha kaścana
na cāsyā sarvabhūteṣu kaścidarthavyapāśrayaḥ (3.18)

“For him, in this world, there is nothing whatsoever to gain (or interest) in ‘what is done’ or ‘what is not done’. For him, nor there is any expectation (or dependency) for anything in any other being. (3.18)”

“There is a great insight. Liberated person is forever free and seeks no benefit in whatever is done or not done. Neither is any expectation to gain anything from anyone. As a result, there is no resistance to anything. Whatever comes is welcome. When there is no resistance, where then is the grief!”

“Why there is no more duty for such liberated person? What about his living needs?”

“The Seer knows that the ‘*Prārpta-Karma*’ decides the time of death and so it should also maintain the embodiment till death. Therefore, whatever needed to nourish the body will naturally come - this, the Liberated knows. For the same reason, there is also no need for the Liberated to safe-keep possessions for future needs. So the personal ‘*Yoga-Kshema*’ or the ‘*Artha-Purushārta*’ are no more valid for the Liberated. As the Liberated remains happy internally, there is also no need for seeking external joy. Thus the ‘*Kāma-Purushārtam*’ is also nullified.”

“Aiya, Does it mean, the Liberated does not do any action anymore?”

tasmādasaktah satataṁ kāryam karma samācara
asakto hyācarankarma paramāpnoti pūruṣah (3.19)

“Therefore, without attachment, constantly perform the action which should be done; for, performing action without attachment, man reaches the Supreme. (3.19)”

“Bhagavān instructs Arjuna that he should continue to perform the duties as Karma-Yoga and by doing so attain the supreme state. In other words, until one attains the supreme knowledge, one must continue to perform Karma-Yoga. You asked if there is any action due by the Liberated. What is left for the Liberated to do, who has already given-up the ‘arta-kāma-purushārta’, except to endure the current life until the end of Prārabtha-Karma. So the Liberated is free to choose whatever is appropriate to sustain ‘Dharma’ in support of the ‘*jagad-chakra*’. Thus the Liberated remains free and is called ‘*Jivan-Mukta*’.”

“So the Liberated may still continue to do actions?”

“Yes, The ‘Jivan-Mukta’ is free to remain active in this world, making all actions for the benefit of the world. Many such examples exist in our history. Even today, there are many amongst us who are liberated, yet remain with their simple living of selfless actions.”

karmaṇaiva hi samsiddhimāsthitā janakādayah
lokasaṅgrahamevāpi sampaśyankartumarhasi (3.20)

“By performing their prescribed duties, King Janaka and others attained perfe-

tion. You should lead by example to others by performing your work. (3.20)"

'Bhagavān is giving the example of King Janaka, who having attained the knowledge, continued to discharge his duties as a King for the welfare of others. Liberated people thus demonstrate to others the art of living by Karma-Yōga. This way, they also keep their resolute intellect and pure mind unwavering, immune from temptations."

Aiya continued.

"Also Bhagavān now starts to speak about the role of such wise persons. By performing actions, such Liberated persons lead others by example."

yadyadācarati śreṣṭhastattadevetaro janaḥ
sa yatpramāṇam kurute lokastadanuvartate (3.21)

"Whatsoever a great man does, that alone the other men do ; whatever he sets up as the standard, that the world follows. (3.21)"

"Learned people should set examples to others. The most effective are those who show the right path by their very own conduct in life. They are the heros. The glory of Ramayana - is about the glory of the path that Rama followed. You may not have any doubt in understanding this."

"Yes Aiya, these days we attach hero-worship to people who are famous. That is deplorable. Only those who by their words, thoughts and deeds show righteousness should be our heros."

"Yes, having said thus, Bhagavān is thinking that Arjuna may decide to give up action with the notion that he is already a Liberated. He is not yet; even if he is, he still has to perform actions to lead others. For this reason, Bhagavān sets Himself as the example."

na me pārthāsti kartavyam triṣu lokeṣu kiñcana
nānavāptamavāptavyam varta eva ca karmaṇi (3.22)

"I have nothing whatsoever to achieve in the three worlds, o son of Pritha, nor is there anything unattained that should be attained; yet I engage in action. (3.22)"

“Think about this. Bhagavān is now a chariot driver for Arjuna. Why does He need to do such a role! It is His own choice and He does it only for sustaining Dharma. As a house-holder and a King, Bhagavān demonstrates that He is doing actions according to His svadharma. He is Liberated yet follows Karma-Yoga.”

yadi hyahaṁ na varteyam jātu karmanyatandritah
mama vartmānuvartante manusyāḥ pārtha sarvaśah (3.23)

“For, should I not ever engage in action, tirelessly, then others would, in all matters, follow My path, o son of Pritha. (3.23)”

“When someone who is prominent in the society does not set a proper example to others, then the society will also fail to follow what is right. Those who lead must set example by their action, doing things with utmost interest and commitment. Greater responsibility therefore weighs on them.”

“Aiya, if those who should set examples to others, fail to do so, what happens?”

utsīdeyurime lokā na kuryām karma cedaham
saṅkarasya ca kartā syāmupahanyāmimāḥ prajāḥ (3.24)

“These worlds would be ruined if I should not perform action; I should then be the cause of confusion of castes, and the destruction of these people. (3.24)”

“Bhagavān clearly states that if He fails to comply, he will be solely responsible for the chaos that may follow, as others who follow Him, also fail in their Dharma. In every walks of life, therefore those in power and influence on others must demonstrably conduct their life in the righteous way. Ignorant people act in a way that further destroys their opportunity to rise.”

saktāḥ karmaṇyavidvāṁso yathā kurvanti bhārata
kuryādvidvāṁstathāsaktaścikīrṣurlokasaṅgraham (3.25)

“As the ignorant men act from attachment to work, O Bharata (Arjuna), so should the wise act without attachment, wishing the welfare of the world. (3.25)”

“The interest and commitment for the work to be well done may be the same for both the ignorant and the wise. But the difference is, the wise person has

no attachment as he does action in Karma-Yōga, whereas the ignorant does for selfish reasons. Therefore the wise is free from the action whereas the ignorant is bound.”

Aiya continued.

“The main point is that an ignorant person acts zealously for his personal happiness; the wise acts with the same zeal bit for the welfare of others. Here the reminder is given to the wise on how they should act.”

“Aiya, Should the wise person therefore advice the ignorant to change?”

na buddhibhedam janayedajñānāṁ karmasaṅginām
joṣayetsarvakarmāṇī vidvānyuktaḥ samācaran (3.26)

“Let no wise man cause unsettlement in the minds of the ignorant who are attached to action; he should make them do all actions, himself fulfilling them with devotion. (3.26)”

“Bhagavān gave the answer to your question. There is a great insight here. The wise person out of over-zealous attitude should not start preaching and confuse the ignorant person. With out the required maturity, the ignorant may mistake the needed renunciation of outcome as the renunciation of action itself and thus falter. Instead, the wise should continue to set example to others by their conduct: performing actions in the spirit outright renunciation on the outcome. In other words, do not meddle in the affairs of others unless asked. Bhagavān has demonstrated by His act that advice should not given unless it is asked.”

“Aiya, I understand the impact of attachment in the ignorant. What differentiates the wise person from ignorant.”

prakṛteḥ kriyamāṇāni guṇaiḥ karmāṇī sarvaśaḥ
ahankāravimūḍhātmā kartāhamiti manyate (3.27)

“Actions are brought in all cases by Guna, the modalities of Nature. He whose mind is deluded by egoism thinks ‘I am the doer.’ (3.27)”

“Aiya, Bhagavān talks about gunas. Please tell me how the gunas influence actions.”

“We discussed earlier. Gunas impact the thoughts. Thoughts impact actions. When thoughts are nobler, actions tend to be nobler. When thoughts are evil, actions will also be evil. Thus our actions impact the world. Collectively, therefore, the world changes by the actions of everyone.”

“Understood Aiya, How do the gunas bring about actions in us?”

“The modalities of nature - the essential fabric of ‘*prakriti*’ is the guna. These are seen as three types. All embodiments are built on the same fabric - the five subtle organs of perceptions, the five subtle organs of actions and the mind are made-up of these guna. So all our actions - words, deeds and thoughts - are influenced by the guna. The inherent guna is due to the ‘*vāsana*’, the effect of past Karma. However, one can and should nurture and improve the composition of one’s guna in order attain perfection. When the ‘satva-guna’ dominates, one’s mind becomes purer and the actions nobler. The ignorant, due to the false identity of the Self with the embodiments brags ‘I am the doer’ and thus entrapped in Samsārā.”

tattvavittu mahābāho guṇakarmavibhāgayoh
guṇā guṇeṣu vartanta iti matvā na sajjate (3.28)

“But he who knows the truth, o mighty armed, about the divisions of the energies and (their) functions, is not attached. thinking that the energies act upon the energies. (3.28)”

“On the contrary, the Learned knows that the gunas make all objects and also trigger all actions. So all actions and the objects acted upon are the matter of gunas only. Knowing thus, the Learned has no attachment and rather he focuses on nurturing the gunas.

Aiya continued.

“Bhagavān says that the wise knows the truth. He has discriminated his identify away from the Anātma and to the Ātma, the unattached ‘Self’. He thus knows only the ‘guna’ drive all actions and all objects of actions are made up of gunas and all these are merely like drama-scenes to witness and unattached. The Liberated is with the resolute intellect and remains unattached. Ignorant is lost in the inherent gunas and hold a false identity. The wise remains free and that is the difference.”

prakṛterguṇasammūḍhāḥ sajjante guṇakarmasu
tānakṛtsnavido mandānkṛtsnavinna vicālayet (3.29)

“The man of perfect knowledge should not unsettle (the understanding of) the foolish who is of imperfect knowledge, who deluded by the Gunas of nature, attach themselves to the functions of the Gunas (3.29).”

“Aiya, it is again a warning to the wise, not to meddle in other’s affairs, right?”

“Yes, a person may be ignorant and not knowing the truth. Yet, if the he person is doing hard work towards the desired object with attachment, so be it! Performing action is better than inaction. It is also better than doing action without interest or commitment. The wise, who have knowledge of the Self, should not disturb the conviction of such ignorant persons because if their minds are unsettled by the intervention, then they would give up their actions and add further misery to their affairs. Instead, those doing actions driven by attachment should be left undisturbed until for the opportune time to steer their goal towards selfless activities. Again, such intervention should be timely and only at the request or the dire need of the ignorant.”

“Aiya, how then the action should be performed by ignorant man like me, who does not have the qualification to attain the true knowledge, yet seeks liberation?”

mayi sarvāṇi karmāṇi saṁnyasyādhyātmacetasā
nirāśīrnirmamo bhūtvā yudhyasva vigatajvaraḥ (3.30)

“Surrendering all actions to Me, with the mind intent on the Self, freeing your-self from the longing and selfishness, unperturbed by grief, do fight! (3.30).”

“The most relevant, reverent and important message is given here by Bhagavān. Total surrender to God is paramount. It is the essence of Karma-Yōga. By doing all actions for the goodness of others as ‘Ishvara-arpanam’ and accepting all outcome as ‘Ishvara-Prashād’ one does not grieve. Therefore with such spirit of selfless action, Arjuna should perform his duty. This is the advice is to all mankind on how to perform ones duty.”

“Aiya, Bhagavān is asking Arjuna to surrender to Him. Is He not?”

“Yes, We should also understand that by the term ‘me’, Bhagavān is asking us

to abide in the Supreme Self, the Divine Being, the Eternal and the Omniscient, the Self of all. Surrendering all actions does not mean inactivity but acting without attachment and the sense of possession with regard to them. Actions driven by desires and the sense of ownership are binding. But Actions performed without attachment and desires are not binding the performer, no matter what the outcome of the action be. So perfection of attitude in doing actions and handling the outcome of actions is all about the purity of the mind. That requires the mind to be free from all blemishes, and totally abiding in one's Self. With such mind, actions performed cannot be ordinary but extraordinary, done for the sake of God."

ye me matamidaṁ nityamanutiṣṭhanti mānavāḥ
śraddhāvanto'nasūyanto mucyante te'pi karmabhiḥ (3.31)

"Those men who constantly practise this teaching of Mine with faith and without cavilling (not finding fault), they too are liberated from the bondage of all actions. (3.31)"

"Bhagavān reinforces the important attribute of total surrender. It is about the transfer of responsibilities to God and to the Guru. Like a child, who upon getting the hold of Mother's hand, becomes totally fearless in crossing the road as this otherwise arduous task is frolicsome now. Same way, once we surrender to our Guru and God, our hands are held safely and we are steered into the path of perfection. Total surrender requires immense strength of character and 'shraddha', the total commitment to Scriptures and in the teachings of the spiritual preceptor. The sincerity and intensity of purpose become unassailable for those who surrender."

"What happens to them?"

"Their mind becomes pure. Blemishes are gone; The stored intense-desires or the '**vāsana**' are completely burnt. They are not bound by their actions anymore. They are perfectly fit to receive the supreme knowledge and cross the ocean of Samsārā."

"Aiya, What happens to those who do not listen to the divine instruction of Bhagavān?"

ye tvetadabhyasūyanto nānutiṣṭhanti me matam
sarvajñānavimūḍhāṁstānviddhi naṣṭānacetasāḥ (3.32)

“But those who find fault with My teaching and do not practise it, deluded in all knowledge and devoid of discrimination, know them to doomed to destruction (3.32)”

“Well, those who are obstinate in finding fault with the teachings and or not following those in their actions, are at peril. They become more and more deluded, losing their ability to discriminate right from the wrong. They regress and go deeper into the entrapment of Samsārā.”

sadṛśam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛterjñānavānapi
prakṛtim yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kim kariṣyati (3.33)

“Even a wise man acts in accordance with his own nature; beings will follow nature; what can restraint do? (3.33)”

“Bhagavān also says why some people are like that, not abiding to what is being taught. It is because of their lower nature. The resultant of their guna are too low; predominance of Tāmasic or Rājasic, making their actions skewed towards selfish and passionate desires rather than for the wellbeing of others. It is because of those inherent nature, even a sincere aspirant may find it hard to follow the discipline of Karma-Yōga as prescribed by Bhagavān.”

“Why do such lower qualities dominate in us?”

“It is determined by the results of one’s past actions. There is no escape from the ‘vāsana’, as one has to endure embodiments reflective of those. That is why there are those who remain in such lower state of condition.”

“By surrendering to God, can such a person evolve?”

“Of course, evolution is inevitable to all. Surrendering to God is the important requirement. Remember, the rule that one has to experience the results of one’s actions that are driven by desires can never be compromised. Yet, to those who surrender, the grace of God provides the strength of character to face all challenges. Take it another positive way. When one finds that their seeking for liberation is hurdled by their lower nature of character that seems undeniable, one has just opened the door for turning into spiritual contemplation. Turning points exist therein. The grace of God enables them to latch on to those turning points to alter their course of life towards progress.”

indriyasyendriyasyārthe rāgadveśau vyavasthitau
tayorna vaśamāgacchettau hyasya paripanthinau (3.34)

“The love and hatred that the senses feel for their objects are inevitable. But let none come under their sway; for, they are his enemies. (3.34)”

“Bhagavān points out that one does not need to feel guilty if desires of selfish nature recur in their minds and sensory temptations draw the attention at all times. That is natural effect of the composition of the guna. Yet, with the resolute intellect, the mind can be kept free and not swayed by those impulses. For that one needs to labour in control of senses and mind. This requires persistent effort and motivation on the part of the seeker. By revising the goals in life and altering the means of life by the guidance of scripture and spiritual preceptor, one can progress.”

“Aiya, that means, temptations can come even to the minds of the Learned?”

“Yes, it is due to vāsana, the inherent nature, the senses of anyone can cause temptations. The difference is, the ignorant person yields to temptations and therefore gives room to desires that eventually drive all actions; but the wise person is able to discriminate and curb the impact of such temptations to take form as desired.”

śreyānsvadharma viguṇaḥ paradharmātvanuṣṭhitāt
svadharme nidhanaṁ śreyah paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ (3.35)

“Better is one’s own duty, though imperfectly performed, than the duty of another well performed. Better is death in the doing of one’s own duty; the duty of another is fraught with peril. (3.35)”

Aiya continued.

“This is another caution from Bhagavān. Sometimes we are more interested to follow some other life-style and do things that are in violation of our ‘svadharma’. Bhagavān says such approach is not only wrong but also leads to greater peril. It is better to do what you need to do, even poorly, rather than doing someone’s task perfectly.”

“Why does Bhagavān bring this point to Arjuna?”

“Bhagavān is mindful that Arjuna is contemplating on giving up on his ‘svadharma’ and follow the life-style of ‘sanyāsi’, the life of renunciation. Arjuna already indicated to give up all in this world. By doing so, Arjuna commits a sin of not doing what he ought to do according to his ‘svadharma’ and secondly, as he has not acquired the mental condition to become a sanyāsi, he would not adhere well to sanyāsa-āshrama. That is double risk. Bhagavān says therefore, it is better for him to fight and die rather than running away to a life of renunciation.”

§ Conquering Desires

Arjuna uvāca

atha kena prayukto'yam pāpam carati pūruṣah
anicchannapi vārṣneya balādiva niyojitaḥ (3.36)

“Arjuna said

O Varshneya! But under what compulsion, does a man, though reluctant, commit sin, as if constrained by force. (3.36)”

“Aiya, I have this same doubt. I do understand the importance of being righteous and doing virtuous acts. But sometimes, the other side of the mind wants to do something different, making me do things which may be sinful. It is like something else is forcing me to do such erroneous acts.”

“Let us listen to Bhagavān.”

Śrī Bhagavān uvāca

kāma eṣa krodha eṣa rajoguṇasamudbhavaḥ
mahāśano mahāpāpmā viddhyenamiha vairiṇam (3.37)

“Sri Bhagavān said:

It is desire, it is wrath, born of the energy of Rajas all-devouring, all sinful; that, know thou, is the foe here (in this world). (3.37)”

“It is the force of desire that makes us do wrong things and thus committing sin. Desires driven by the lower nature, predominant of rājasic and tāmasic guna can sway the mind towards actions that are binding and sinful. Passion arising out of predominant rājasic nature translate to emotional actions. Anxiety, anger and associated weaknesses then fill one’s mind and delude the intellect. Therefore such desires must be deemed as the worst enemy in this world. There is no external force making one to do sinful acts, it is the allowance inside one’s mind, for passionate desires.”

dhūmenāvriyate vahniryathādarśo malena ca
yatholbenāvṛto garbhastathā tenedamāvṛtam (3.38)

“As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust and as an embryo by the womb, so is this (knowledge) enveloped by that (desire). (3.38)”

“Aiya, What does Bhagavān mean by saying desire envelops the knowledge?”

“Bhagavān elucidates with three examples, each implying a different level of impact. Here by the term ‘this’, the knowledge of the Self is indicated and by the term ‘that’ the ignorance of desire is indicated. When one forgets the true identify with the Self, then there is ‘ahamkāra’ and ‘mamakāra’, the sense of ‘I’ and ‘my’ gets the hold. The clouding ignorance therefore block the ability to discriminate good from bad, right from wrong and truth from false.”

“Aiya, please explain the examples given by Bhagavān.”

“We learnt already that the type of desire depends upon the quality of attachments. When desires are driven by ‘tāmasic guna’, only inert and animal instincts dominate. The divine nature is completely hidden. Bhagavān gives the example of a foetus covered with amniotic fluid in the womb; there is no way the covering could be removed until a definite period of time is elapsed. In the same way, when the tāmasic desires dominate, one has to patiently wait and spend a longer period of time in spiritual contemplation for uncovering the goodness in oneself.”

“When desires are propelled by the passionate rājasic nature?”, I asked.

“In this case, the knowledge is like a mirror but completely covered by the dust of desires; so compared to ‘tāmasic’ desires, we can relatively easily wipe the mirror of mind clean from the dust of ‘rājasic’ desires. But be warned, the dust of desires are persistent and so persistent effort of cleaning the mirror is required. In other words, when rājasic nature dominates, vigilant actions are required to scrutinize those and impose regulations. Sense and mind control are important abilities that one should practice and attain.”

“Aiya, is there a drawback of Satvic desires too?”

“Yes, Bhagavān says even ‘divine desires’ driven by the predominance of ‘satvic’ nature also envelop our knowledge and discrimination just as smoke envelopes

fire. But unlike the long and persistent efforts needed for other type of desires, even the slightest wind of discrimination can dispel the smoke of desire. The veiling is thin and hence it requires only a little effort to remove it. So if we need to have desires, it is far better to have only 'satvic' desires."

"Aiya, desires to learn the scriptures, desires to do virtuous things - all these are 'satvic' right! Am I to understand that even such divine desires elude our true knowledge?"

"Desires for virtuous deeds are necessary. Only then our life goals - purushārtam - can be steered towards liberation. But there comes the time that there is nothing to desire for, as there is nothing other than the Self. In that state of non-dual existence, one with the Universal-Self, desire has no existence. Afterwards, as the truly Liberated, there is nothing to desire for."

āvṛtam jñānametena jñānino nityavairiṇā
kāmarūpeṇa kaunteya duṣpurenānalena ca (3.39)

"O Son of Kunti, wisdom is enveloped by this constant enemy of the wise in the form of desire, which is insatiable as the fire. (3.39)"

"Bhagavān now warns about the insatiable nature of desire. Like fire that grows as we feed with fuel, desires too grow as we keep attending to those. For the ignorant person, desires are constant companions. But for the wise, desires are like enemies constantly encroaching to take away the freedom and peace. The wise knows that 'rāga' leads to 'shoka' and to 'moha'. So the wise fights against the desires with the view to cull those but the ignorant indulges on those to his peril."

"Aiya, from where desires come?"

indriyāṇi mano buddhirasyādhiṣṭhānamucyate
etairvimohayatyesa jñānamāvṛtya dehinam (3.40)

"The senses, mind, and the reasoning intellect are said to be its seat; these deludes the embodied by veiling the wisdom. (3.40)"

"Bhagavān shows the seat of desires, or should I say, the hide-out of the enemy! If one knows where the enemy is hiding, one could be vigilant and cleanse those hide-outs, removing the potential threats at their root, is it not? The sense,

mind and the intellect are the hide-out places for the desires.”

“Aiya, knowing now the hide-out, how do we challenge the enemy, the desire?”

tasmaat twam indriyaanyaadau niyamya bharatarshabha
paapmaanam prajahi hyenam jnaana vijnana naashanam || 3.41 ||

“Therefore, O the Best of the Bharatas, controlling the senses first, you kill this sinful thing, the destroyer of knowledge and wisdom. (3.41)”

“Bhagavān gives clear steps. First handle the sense organs as those are the ones bringing temptations to the mind. It is not by employing forced suppression of senses which causes pain and always in vain. But apply regulations. Suppression of senses is not desirable but their gradual reorientation is essential. Through practice, one can attain the mastery to bring senses into voluntary regulation. Mind should be able to discriminate and ignore sensual triggers and temptations. Mind should be the master of senses. The ‘dama’ and ‘sama’, the control of senses and mind respectively are aided by specific sādhana or practices. By those practices, apply persistent efforts to attain the senses-regulation and mind-control. Then with discrimination, the desire, the greatest of all enemies and the peril leading to sin, can be killed.”

“Aiya, What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom? Bhagavān says, ‘Jñāna’ and ‘Vijñāna’. Please explain.”

“Bhagavān Sankara says ‘**Jñāna**’ is the knowledge of the Self acquired through a study of the scriptures and from spiritual preceptor. This is an indirect knowledge or ‘**Paroksha-Jñāna**’. This is the knowledge : ‘there exists Ātma, free and unattached to Anātma, the insentient embodiments’. But this knowledge has to be realized. The term ‘**Vijñāna**’ or wisdom refers to the direct knowledge ‘**Aparoksha-Jñāna**’. It is the realization, ‘**anubhuti**’, of the Self. This is the realization : ‘I am Ātma’. Bhagavān is pointing out that the desires and the mental agitations owing to desires are blockers of both direct and indirect knowledge of the Self.”

indriyāṇi parāṇyāḥur indriyebhyāḥ param manah
manasas tu parā buddhir yo buddheḥ paratas tu saḥ || 3.42 ||

“They say that the senses are superior to the body; superior to the senses is the mind; superior to the mind is intellect; and one who is superior even to the

intellect is He - The Self. (3.42)"

"Bhagavān now concludes by enumerating the order of superiority in the pursuit of Self-Realization so that we can apply due perspectives in handling those. The Self, Ātma is the most superior, the realization and identification with which one attains liberation and completeness. By discrimination, the embodiment is to be known as Anātma. Yet the embodiment is to be used as the instrument in pursuit of our goal. At the bottom of the list is our physical embodiment - the gross and tangible part with which we initially attach the notion of self identity. By appraising the gross-body, we conclude 'I am not the gross body'. The inert gross-body is animated with the senses, the organs of perception and actions and therefore the senses are superior to the gross-body. Yet on appraisal, senses too are incomplete, never can be perfect and inherently inert. We can therefore discard those as not the Self. Mind is superior to senses as it is mind that translates sensory impulses to coherent thoughts. But the mind is never fulfilled. It changes and remain insentient when its not powered by the consciousness. Hence mind is not the Self and we discard. The discriminating intellect is superior than the mind of thoughts, as intellect directs actions. Yet intellect is never complete and often faulty, influenced by the state of mind. Therefore the effulgence of consciousness, the only sentience principle can be the Self and in that supreme knowledge, we dwell and attain wisdom."

"Aiya, what is the essence of this ranking?"

"It is indicate both the reverence and the relative importance of these faculties of embodiment in making use of those in the spiritual pursuit. Use these to destroy the enemy - the desires that lead to peril."

evaṁ buddheḥ param buddhvā sanstabhyātmānam ātmanā
jahi śatrumahā-bāho kāma-rūparūpa durāsadam || 3.43 ||

"O Mighty armed (Arjuna)! Thus knowing Him (Ātma) as superior to the intellect, subdue the (false-identity of) self by the (true knowledge of) Self and destroy the formidable enemy, called desire. (3.43)"

Aiya said.

"Bhagavān now concludes with the instruction to all, which also brings out the essence of Vedanta. Having attained the knowledge that Ātma is superior, one should focus only on Ātma, the true Self. With that power of knowledge

the false notion of self with the physical and mental embodiments should be removed. As the embodiments are essential instruments for our progress, Bhagavān says, restrains those instruments - meaning that their utility should be only to aid in the pursuit of Self-Realization. When such goal is set in steadfast focus, we are totally empowered to seek the hide-out of desires, the most difficult enemy to destroy, and actually destroy. That is the biggest of all battles. That is the war that we all should keenly engage, fight and win. Only to equip in the mammoth war, Karma-Yōga is prescribed. Our strength of character in terms of pure-mind and resolute-intellect is achieved only by performing Karma-Yōga. By doing Karma-Yōga, one is totally devoted to God as all actions are done as 'Ishava-arpanam' and all effects are revered as 'Ishvara-Prashād'. Then there is no fear of defeat against the desire and all its dire consequences in the form of Samsārā."

om tat sat
iti srimad bhagavadgeetaasu upanishatsu
brahma vidyaayaam Yōgashaastre
sri krishnaarjuna samvaade
karmayogo naama tritiyo'dhyaayah ||

Thus in the Upanishads of the glorious Bhagavad Gita,
the science of the Eternal, the scripture of Yōga,
the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna,
ends the third discourse entitled
The Yōga of Action.





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